Thoughts well Employ'd;

OR, THE

DUTY

OF

Self-Obſervation.

To which are added

PYTHAGORAS's

Golden Verſes

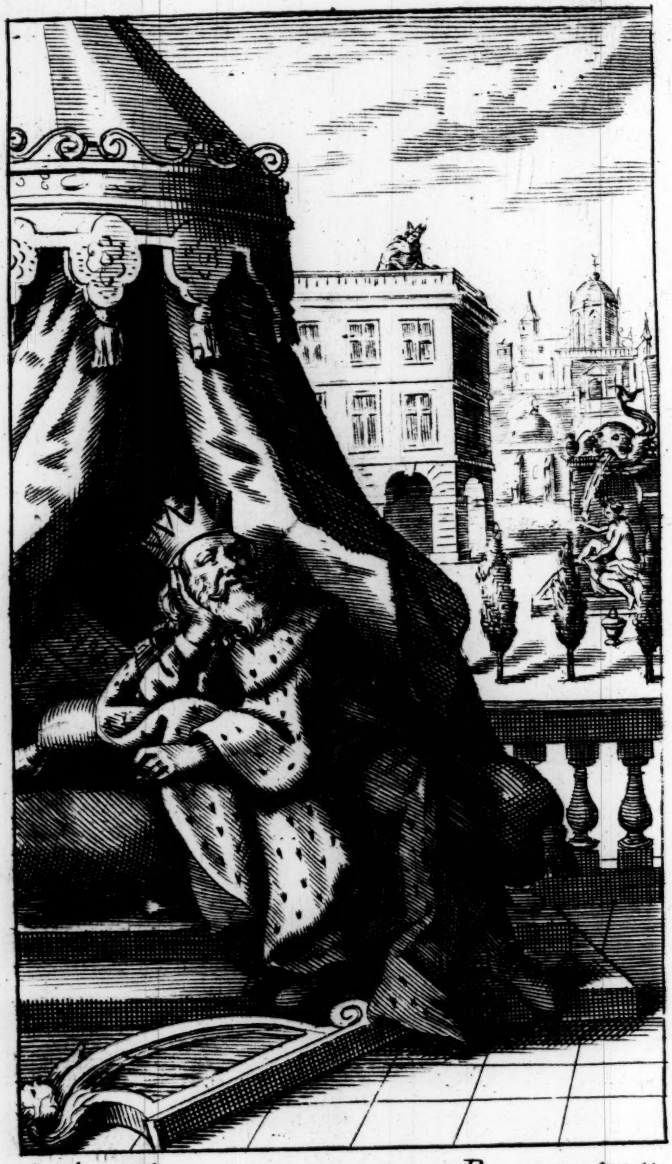
Made Chriſtian.

By *EDM. ARWAKER*,
Rector of *Drumglaſs* in *Ireland*.

The Second Edition.

LONDON,
Printed by *Tho. Warren* for *Francis Saunders*,
at the *Blue Anchor* in the Lower Walk of
the *New-Exchange*, 1697.

OR IS THE FRIENDLESS MASTER OF A WORLD
Sam.l Sheafe



I thought on my ways &c. Ps. 119. 59 v.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

Her GRACE

THE

DUTCHESS

OF

ORMOND.

May it please your Grace,

IN Circumstances which put Men beyond the possibility of returning Benefits, it is a Felicity that they are not as well deprived of means to testifie their Gratitude.

And were it my Happiness, that the

Dedication of this Book could contribute to produce as kind an Effect for me, Your Grace would be intituled to it by a manifold Claim and Right: Since as I began my growth in a Seminary of Learning planted by the late Memorable Duke of *Ormond*, ſo I have continued it under the benign Influences of his Family, and the Houſe of *Beaufort*, in Your Grace's Service; and to the Advantages I have received from that, owe the All that I pretend to.

But, Madam, I could never hope that ſo mean a Preſent as this Treatiſe, ſhould find Acceptance with Your Grace, as a Teſtimony of my profound Reſpect and Gratitude, did not your eminent Practice of the Duty which it recommends, give me the aſſurance that a Subject ſo agreeable to your Inclination, will pre-

prevail with you to excuſe the weakneſs of my Performance, and that I am as happy as juſt, in my Application to your Patronage.

For, Madam, the refined Purity of your Life, which renders it the Subject of our Praiſe, as well as a Pattern for our imitation, confirms us, that your Thoughts have been ſucceſsfully employ'd in the Care and Regulation of it; and that, becauſe you want no Admonitions to remind you of a Buſineſs ſo pleaſing and familiar, you will encourage thoſe Endeavours that tend to make it as much the World's, as it is Your Grace's Practice.

By this Piety, as exalted as your Quality, you make as glorious a Figure in the Church as in the Court, and are equally the Bleſſing and the Ornament of thoſe Illu-

ſtrious Families from which you are derived, and to which you are united; but Your Grace is withal ſo ſtudious to avoid the Applauſe which you deſerve, that unleſs I could as eaſily excuſe my ſelf to your Modeſty and Humility, as thoſe and your other Vertues would juſtifie me to the World, I muſt not attempt your Character, but paſs in ſilence the Perfections which endear you to all who have the Happineſs to know you, and make them as zealous to divulge your Excellencies, as Your Grace is to conceal them.

And though thus I ſeem unjuſt to Your Grace's Merit, I ſhall beſt conſult my own intereſt, by this means; ſince the moſt ſucceſsful Meaſures I can take to obtain your Pardon, and Acceptance of this Addreſs,

Addreſs, will be not to mention the extraordinary Qualifications that require it from,

MADAM,

Your Grace's

Moſt Dutiful Chaplain,

Edm. Arwaker.

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Pythagoras's
GOLDEN VERSES
Made Christian.

MAke it the chief imployment of thy days
The Great First Mover of the World to praise,
This, His and Nature's Law declare his due,
And as they bid thee serve him, shew thee how.
Still to thy Oath an awful reverence bear,
For Heaven is Witness to what Man does swear.
To Angels and to Saints pay great Respect,
Yet free from Adoration as Neglect,
For they of Heaven a near resemblance bear,
As those its Glory, these its Goodness share.
A filial honour to thy Parents shew,
Who gave thy Being, and preserv'd it too.

To all whom Blood makes thy Allies, be kind,
Let nothing ſep'rate what that cement join'd.
From thy Acquaintance cull that only Friend
Whom Virtue to thy choice does recommend;
Friendſhip according to its Object proves,
And he loves firmly who for Virtue loves.
His mild reproof thou thankfully muſt bear,
He loves, and therefore would not have thee err.
Shew him his failings, yet to all be kind,
Here only Love is pardonably blind.
Patient by choice as by compulſion be,
Turn Reſolution to Neceſſity.
Subdue thy Paſſions to Wiſe Reaſon's ſway,
No Wretch like him that does his Slaves obey.
Forbear ill actions for their very name,
As well as fear of puniſhment or ſhame.
Let Solitude not prompt thee to a Sin,
But fear the Witneſs which thou bear'ſt within.
Let thy performances and words agree,
And be as juſt as thou wouldſt ſeem to be.
Act with diſcretion, and the end approve,
Know whither, and the reaſon why you move.

Remember that inevitable fate
Does on the Race of ſhort-liv'd Mortals wait;
Then be not buſy to increaſe thy ſtore,
'Tis baſer to be Covetous than Poor.

What Heav'n inflicts with mild ſubmiſſion bear,
And let thy Duty as thy choice appear.
Troubles alike to good and bad are ſent,
To thoſe a Grace, to theſe a puniſhment.

Oft diff'rent Speeches will imploy thy Ear,
Then ſtrive not all to ſhun, nor all to hear.
When any one does what is ill propoſe,
Be leſs attentive, but not too moroſe.

Let not fair Carriage, or ſmooth blandiſhment
Seduce to unſafe actions thy conſent;
Do nothing which thou didſt not firſt debate,
Tis Fool-like to be inconſiderate.
In all thou undertakſt foreſee th' Event,
Leſt thy raſh haſte makes thee too late repent.

Attempt not things not throughly underſtood,
Doubt makes an Error, though the work is good:
He that with forecaſt and ſound Judgment ſtears,
Makes his wiſh'd Port, and ſhuns the Rock he fears.

To theſe Receipts that do compoſe the Mind,
Let thoſe that keep the Body right, be join'd;
Since they each others temper ſympathize,
They ſhou'd alike partake of our advice.

Obſerve a Mean in Food and Exerciſe,
Exceſs and Want do equal prejudice:
Be not too nice a Critick in thy Meat,
Nor yet too careleſs what thou art to eat;
Let that ſuffice which may thy Life exempt
From the two ills of Envy and Contempt.

Each Night, e'er Sleep thy Mem'ry does betray,
Reflect on every paſſage of the Day;
Inquire of Conſcience what thou didſt omit
That ſhou'd be done, what do that was unfit.
For know to do ill deeds is not alone
A Crime, 'tis Sin to leave the good Undone.
Thus from this ſtrict review thou ſhalt receive
Occaſion either to Rejoice or Grieve.
Good Deeds or ill, when known, do Heaven prevent,
And are their own Reward or Puniſhment.
Thus thou God's forfeit Image ſhalt retrieve,
Virtue's his neareſt Repreſentative.

In all thy Works thy Prayers to Heaven addreſs,
Whence only flows Aſſiſtance and Succeſs.
Thus thou with Nature ſhalt familiar grow,
The Cauſes, Means, and End of all things know.
Thou ſhalt diſcover each ones Excellence,
As Heaven does more or leſs to each diſpenſe.
This will inſtruct thee not to hope in vain,
And how thou mayſt thy juſt deſires obtain.
Thou ſhalt perceive how Men outdo their Fate,
What haſte they make to be Unfortunate.
Wretches who blind and deaf to Goodneſs, run
Headlong to Miſries they might ſee and ſhun;
Loſing themſelves in Labyrinths of woe,
Whence they no way to a wiſh'd *Exit* know.
'Tis not impulſe but an ungovern'd Will
Rouls them through theſe Viciſſitudes of ill:
'Tis an innate and undiſcover'd Foe
That hurries Mankind to their overthrow,
Paſſion, which once broke looſe from Reaſons ſway,
Impoſes Laws on what it ſhou'd obey.
'Tis dang'rous to oppoſe this Enemy,
The ſureſt way to Conquer is to fly.

Ah

Ah God, what bliſs wouldſt thou on Man beſtow,
Didſt thou inſtruct him how himſelf to know!
Yet do not thou diſtruſt, thou haſt a Light
Within, that will direct thy Courſe aright;
Be led by That, and thou ſhalt find ſuch Reſt
As nothing ſhall be able to moleſt:
Therefore from things prohibited refrain,
'Tis Sin to act when Conſcience bids abſtain.
If thou woud'ſt have thy Earthly part refin'd,
Or from delights of Senſe withdraw thy Mind,
Keep Headſtrong Paſſion in with Curb and Bit,
And ſtill the Reigns to Reaſon's hand commit;
Thus thou, reſigning this ſhort painful Breath,
Shalt Triumph o'er the Power of Sin and Death.

Advertiſement.

A *Lady's Religion.* In a Letter to the Honourable my Lady *Howard.* By a Divine of the Church of *England.* With a Prefatory Epiſtle to the ſame Lady. By a Lay-Gentleman.

Thoughts well Employ'd:

OR, THE

DUTY

OF

SELF-Observation.

The Introduction.

AS God, by creating Man *after his own Image*, did manifest, a design of exalting him to the participation of his Bliss; so he furnished him with means, and chalked him out a way to arrive at the Sublime Enjoyment.

And lest the Everlasting *Pleasures at God's right Hand*, should not prevail on Man to entertain his Appetite with its proper Object, and persuade him to em-

ploy his time in the purſuit and acquiſition of it; What in itſelf was his Intereſt, became his Duty too by a Divine Sanction, and was enjoyned him under the ſevere penalty of Miſeries to puniſh his diſobedience, as great and laſting as the Joys that were to reward him for obeying.

But Man, though aſſur'd that his eternal Happineſs, or Ruine in a future ſtate, depends upon the *ordering his Converſation*, or as it is in the Original, *the diſpoſing his Way aright*, in this preſent World, which alone can qualifie him for *ſeeing the Salvation of God*; is yet, too often, ſo ſtupidly inconſiderate, and brutiſhly inſenſible, that he never makes any inquiry into his courſe of life, never takes his Ways into ſerious Conſideration, or at beſt, very rarely thinks and reflects upon himſelf, what he does, and in what rode he travels, whether his feet are in the *Way of Life or Death*, or whether Heaven or Hell will be his Journey's end, and happineſs or miſery his Portion; but goes on ſtill without looking back upon his paſt life, or forward to that which is to come; thus *he walks in darkneſs and knows not whither he goes*, and while like *Solomon's* Fool, his eyes, which ſhould be *in his head*,

heed, are employ'd *in the ends of the Earth*, he is a ſtranger at home, and unacquainted with himſelf.

This Inconſideration and Incogitancy occaſion'd that aſſertion of the Pſalmiſt, *Man that is in Honor and underſtandeth not, is like the Beaſts that periſh.* *Pſ.* 49. 20. Nay it degrades him to a ſtate below the level with Brutes, ſince *the Ox knows his owner, and the Aſs his Maſter's Crib*, but the unthinking animal Man *doth not conſider.*

Of this lethargick temper and condition, we have a lively repreſentation in the Prodigal Son, St. *Luke* 15. He demands his Portion of his Father, not conſidering that it was in better hands, where it would be managed to moſt advantage, and that he could not truſt it with a worſe Steward than himſelf; he leaves the eaſe and plenty of his Father's Houſe, not foreſeeing what different uſage he ſhall find in a Stranger's Family; he *takes his journey into a far Country*, not caring how he ſhall return; and *conſumes his Subſtance in riotous living*, regardleſs whence he ſhall receive ſupplies: Nay, he takes up at laſt with the ſordid and deſpicable employment of *feeding Swine*, without obſerving how like his charge he was, or rather

more filthy and deteſtable. And had he been admitted to their Meſs, and allow'd to fill himſelf with the *husks* that were thrown to them, he had perhaps continued in that wretched ſtate, without hope, or deſign of altering his condition. But when Hunger pinched him, and no man offer'd to relieve him, and he could not among all thoſe *Whoriſh Women*, who had reduced him to want a *Morſel of Bread*, find one to entertain him with that poor repaſt; this brought him *to himſelf*, to reflect on his folly and his miſery, to think how many hired Servants of his Father had *meat enough and to ſpare*, while he periſhed for want of neceſſary food, and yet was forced to a moſt Servile drudgery to earn what would not ſatisfie a moderate Appetite. This remembrance of his Father's Houſe, begets in him a reſolution to be no more a ſtranger to himſelf, or that; but to ariſe and return thither; to acknowledge his tranſgreſſion, and beg his Father's pardon, and re-admiſſion to his favour, and his family, though in the capacity only of a menial Servant.

This return met with ſucceſs beyond his expectation, he no ſooner *came to himſelf*, and within his Father's ſight, but the indulgent Parent took compaſſion on him,

him, fell on his neck and kiſſed him, called for the beſt Robe to cloath him, ordered a Ring to be put upon his finger, and ſhoes upon his feet, and kill'd the fatted Calf to entertain him, to rejoyce and make merry for his recovery.

And if we pitied his miſery, we cannot but congratulate his good fortune, our grief to ſee him among the Swine, muſt be turned to joy to find him at his Father's Table. And then if a worſe ſtupidity than his, has not invaded us, we ſhall learn to *go and do likewiſe*, to think upon our ways, inquire and look into our ſelves, that making a timely diſcovery of the errors and corruptions there, we may ſeriouſly addreſs our ſelves to reform and cleanſe them, by an early application of the moſt appoſite remedies. For ſure the great danger of neglecting this duty, of Self-reflection, and the as great benefit of putting it ſpeedily into practice, will prevail on us not to diſmiſs it to *another opportunity*, but awake and rouze us from *the ſleep of death*, if we would be turned from *darkneſs, into light*, from the *power of Satan, unto God*. If we would no longer continue in the impiety, nor incur the puniſhment, of cloſe Hypocriſie, or unmasked prophaneneſs, but triumph in the Vertue and the Reward of

righteouſneſs and true holineſs; we muſt *think upon our ways, and turn our feet unto God's Teſtimonies.*

This is the *Bethesda* to which they, whoſe Souls are under Spiritual declenſions, muſt come, to *lift up the hands which hang down,* to *confirm the feeble knees,* and to *ſtrengthen the things that are ready to dye*; that ſhaking off their lazineſs or formality in holy duties, they may be *quickned in righteouſneſs,* and recover their former vigour and activity, nay the benign light and influence of God's Spirit; which by alienating themſelves from him, they had provok'd him to withdraw.

Thus by making *ſtreight paths for their feet,* that which is *lame* ſhall be *healed,* and no more *turned out of the way.*

This was the courſe and method taken by the *Man after God's own heart,* as we have it from himſelf, *Pſ.* 119. 59. *I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy Teſtimonies.* What the ways were that employ'd his thought and recollection, we may learn from his wiſh that they were made ſo direct, that he might keep God's Statutes, *ver.* 5. Meaning an exact adjuſtment of his life to the perfection of that Rule, from which he had never wreatly ſwerved, but in his injurious

dealing with *Uriah*; ſince the ſacred Oracles have given him this Character, that *he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aſide from any thing that he commanded him, all the days of his life, ſave only in that matter*, 1 *Kings* 15. 5. which we find to be the chief Subject of his complaint, and the penitential acknowledgments of his frailty, with which the Pſalter does abound.

He took no care to *make a Covenant with his Eyes*, or deſire God to *turn them away from beholding Vanity*, but from the roof of his Pallace ſaw *Bathſheba* waſhing herſelf, and finding the Woman was *very beautiful to look upon*, feaſted his ſight with the unlawful object, not foreſeeing what a penance it ſhould undergo for that excurſion.

Nor were his eyes more eager in looking, than his tongue in inquiring after *Uriah*'s Wife, and he takes her to his Houſe and Bed, without conſidering how injurious he was to God, his Neighbour, and himſelf, by his laſcivious dalliance there, or that the Scene would ſoon be changed from that diverſion, to *water it with his tears.*

And when the effect of his unchaſte embraces was ready to diſcover the Adultery, he adds Murder, to prevent it, not conſider-

ing how much of his eaſe and quiet he muſt Sacrifice to expiate the guilt, and ſtill the crying of *Uriah*'s bloud. But when *Nathan*, in a Parable, had brought him to a ſenſe and abhorrence of the injuſtice and impiety of ſuch doings, and to paſs ſentence on the Offender, and then inform'd him that he was the guilty Perſon, whom his own mouth had condemn'd to dye; then he began to make a ſharp reflection on himſelf, and cry, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord*; and then he receives this Abſolution, *the Lord alſo hath put away thy ſin, thou ſhalt not dye*, 2 Sam. 12. 13.

But, alas! what would it have availed him to *think upon his ways*, unleſs that reflection had produced the happy reſult of *turning his feet unto God's Teſtimonies?* he might think upon them, and be never the farther from perſiſting in them; nay, he might think upon them ſo as to repeat in his thoughts the impiety of his actions, and feed his luſtful fancy by chewing the Cud with pleaſure; but it was not ſo he thought upon them, not ſlightly or ſuperficially, not with complacency and ſatisfaction; but he thought upon the great wickedneſs, and the fatal deſtructive conſequences of them; he thought upon them with ſorrow and regret, with deteſtation

and

and abhorrence, and with reſolutions of forſaking them, and taking better courſes; and as ſoon as he conceives the thought, he puts it in execution, and *turns his feet unto God's Teſtimonies.*

Here then we have a pattern for our performing the great duty of Self-reflection, ſo abſolutely neceſſary and ſo hugely advantagious, that without it, we cannot be approved in this World, or rewarded in the next.

And indeed ſuch is the general corruption of our ways, ſo filthy and abominable are we become, in *vain* and extravagant *thoughts*, in light and *unſeaſon'd Speeches*, and in ſinful and wicked Actions, that the complaint may be as ſeaſonable now, as ever, *there is none that doeth good, no not one. Pſ.* 14. 3. So that unleſs we will run on in ſin, to ruine and deſtruction, with the ſame irrational rage and confidence that makes the *horſe ruſh into the battel*, we *muſt think upon our ways*, and *underſtand and ſeek after God.* That famous celebrated ſaying, *Know thy Self*, was not without reaſon ſaid by *Juvenal* to have come down from Heaven, and is worthily recommended to Mankind, to be deeply impreſt upon our Memories, and frequently revolved within our thoughts. For this

intimacy

intimacy and familiarity at home, will not only ſhew us what is amiſs and out of order with us, and lead us to reform and rectifie it; but will prevent our future failings, and inliſt us in the number of the *Wiſe*, who *fear* and *depart from Evil*; but without it we ſhall be aſſimilated to the *fool*, who *rages and is confident*; who like *Balaam* not ſeeing the error of his ways, nor the drawn Sword pointed at his breaſt, preſſes forward to his ruine: Whereas did we take the Wiſe man's counſel, and *in every thing remember the end*, Eccleſ. 7. 36. we ſhould not *go aſtray*.

This would not allow us to entertain ſuch thoughts as would accuſe us to our ſelves, and which afterwards we ſhould ſtrive in vain to baniſh; nor to utter inconſiderately any words, which we ſhould endeavour to recal, but inſucceſsfully; nor to be guilty of ſuch Actions, as we ſhould too late begin to wiſh undone.

This reflection and care of themſelves *Moſes* wiſhes *Iſrael* would undertake, as an argument of their prudence, *Deut.* 32. 29. *O that they were wiſe, that they would think on theſe things, that they would conſider their latter end!*

An unthinking Perſon is a term ſynonymous for a Fool, and ſuch a one is by the

Pſalmiſt

Pſalmiſt herded with the *beaſts*, nor is he injured in the compariſon, ſince he is tranſformed into their reſemblance, while being honour'd by God, above other creatures, with the endowments of a rational and immortal Soul, he remains as inſenſible of theſe advantages, as if they were never granted him, or that he never had receiv'd the means of knowing them; and like a Brute, is ſo intent on the preſent poor enjoyments, of this life, ſuited to his ſenſual Appetite, that he never looks forward to the unſpeakable felicities of a better, deſign'd for the ſatisfaction of his more refined deſires; nor thinks in what a dangerous path he treads, but makes himſelf a ſlave to thoſe Luſts and Paſſions which it is his Right to govern, and ſo ſlights the true and laſting Good, for the poſſeſſion of counterfeit and tranſitory Pleaſures, and is puniſh'd for his neglect, with endleſs ſufferings and torments that are ineffable.

Now it's an unpardonable ignorance for a man to have acquainted himſelf with foreign Nations, and never take notice of his native Country; to be curious to impertinence in prying into other mens lives and actions, and yet never make an inquiry into his own, which is of more impor-

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tance to him. This our Saviour reſembles to ſpying a *Mote in another's Eye*, while the *Beam in our own* eſcapes our obſervation, St. *Matt.* 7. 3. and adviſes us to look at home, and clear our own ſight firſt, before we attempt our brother's cure or reprehenſion. Now we ſhould truly look into our ſelves, and think effectually on our ways, would we inſpect our ſelves as nicely as we do our Brethren, if we would diſmiſs that partiality in our ſelf-love, which ſhews us our own failings thro' the reverſe of the Perſpective, where they ſeem minute and diſtant; and look on them through that end, that brings them nearer to our view, and repreſents them in their juſt dimenſions.

For while we are *lovers of our ſelves*, we are unfit to be judges of our actions, 'tis the difference in our affection that makes a difference in our Judgment, between our own ways and our Neighbours, and ſuch *diverſe Weights and diverſe Meaſures are an abomination to the Lord.* But if we would as impartially *judge our ſelves* as we are apt to cenſure others, we ſhould eſcape being *judged by him.*

It is one of the Choiceſt rules in the Golden Verſes of *Pythagoras*, and has not the leaſt contributed to gain them that Splen-

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did Epithet, That we ſhould not give way to ſleep, or cloſe our Eyes to reſt at night, before we examine our ſelves, and enter on a ſtrict inquiry how we have liv'd the preceding day, what evil we have committed, what good we have left undone, and wherein we have performed our duty as we ought. For hence we ſhall receive theſe benefits, that as by the frequency of this practice, our judgments will become unbyaſſed, and we ſhall not partially overlook or extenuate our failings; ſo we ſhall find a ſweet complacency in reflecting on our good deeds, for our encouragement to perſeverance in well doing; and a remorſe for our evil actions, to deter us from repeating them. As *Job* pleaſed himſelf with the declaration, that *the bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh came upon him, and he cauſed the Widow's heart to ſing for joy.* Job 29. 13. Or as St. *Paul* exults and triumphs in the knowledge that he had *fought a good fight, and finiſhed his courſe, and that there was laid up for him a Crown,* 2 Tim. 4. 7. While the Wicked *lye down in their ſhame, and their confuſion covers them becauſe they have ſinned, and not obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.* Jer. 3. 25. While, like *Ephraim*, they *ſmite upon the thigh and are confounded becauſe they*

they bear the reproach of their Youth. Jer. 31. 19. And when we find the remembrance of our ſins thus grievous unto us, and the burden of them thus intolerable, no privacy ſhall tempt us to a wickedneſs in hope of its concealment, ſince it cannot eſcape our own ſcrutiny, and we are the ſevereſt cenſurers of our ways; which will make us bluſh as much to do evil, by our ſelves, as in the preſence of the moſt grave, authoritative Perſon, and as ſcrupulous of ſinning in our Cloſets and retirements, as in the places of greateſt reſort and concourſe; becauſe we bear about us a ſtrict obſervator of our actions, whoſe clamorous reprehenſions we can neither ſilence, nor avoid; which will not ſuffer us to make a wrong eſtimate of our ſelves, and *rejoyce to do evil*, through an opinion that all we do is well, becauſe we do not conſider and *think upon our ways*; which is the reaſon that our hearts are in the *houſe of mirth*, when they ſhould be in the *houſe of mourning*, and we go chearfully on in our wickedneſs without ſaying *what have we done?* and thus is our *ſtrength devour'd, and we know not of it.*

But if we wou'd conſider in our hearts, that God remembers all our wickedneſs, we would be more wary and circumſpect, would

would *think upon our ways and turn our feet unto his Teſtimonies.* And for our better encouragement to employ our thoughts in this weighty buſineſs, and to this great advantage, we have a Royal Example given us, and it were to be wiſhed we would be as ready to imitate this King in ſo good a Work, as we are to follow others, in things not ſo commendable.

And for our better help in going through this Employment, let us exerciſe our thoughts on the following Conſiderations.

Firſt, *What the ways are on which we muſt employ our Thoughts.*

Secondly, *What it is to think upon our ways.*

Thirdly, *In what reſpect our thoughts muſt be employed: what we are to think on in our ways.*

Fourthly, *What is the moſt ſeaſonable time for undertaking this Employment of thinking upon our Ways.*

Fifthly, *What are the motives and inducements, that oblige us to this duty*; and

Sixthly, *What muſt be the reſult of our performing it.*

I. *What*

I. *What the ways are that must Employ our Thoughts.*

The Holy Ghoſt doth frequently in Scripture veile our converſation upon earth under the Metaphor of a Way, to inform us that here we have *no abiding place*, but are only Strangers and *Sojourners* in this *Vale of Miſery*, and during our continuance therein, are travelling the road to another country, in ſearch of an *Eternal Reſt*. This is the *way* which all fleſh had ſo *corrupted upon earth*, that God repented he had made a Creature ſo rebellious as Man proved, and ſent a deluge to deſtroy, what he once created with delight. This is the *Way of Man* upon which *God's Eyes* are ſtill intent, and of which the Pſalmiſt ſays, *thou compaſſeſt my path, and art acquainted with all my ways.* Pſal. 139. 3. meaning his courſe of life and converſation, and that in the ſeveral particulars of it, his thoughts, words, and actions. For *ver.* 2. he ſays, *thou underſtandeſt my thoughts afar of*, and *ver.* 4. *there is not a word in my tongue but thou underſtandeſt it altogether*, and *ver.* 2. *thou knoweſt my down-ſitting and my up-riſing.*

So that by our ways is intended, *Firſt*, the Way of the heart, our thoughts, purpoſes

poſes and intentions, it being part of the corruption of Man's way, which occaſion'd the flood, *that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually*, Gen. 6. 5. And this Holy *David* calls the way within, when he deſires God to *ſearch him and know his heart, to try him and know his thoughts, and ſee if there be any wicked way in him.* Which teaches us that all our appetites and affections, all our deſires and inclinations, are our ways, and the proper objects of our thought, which will find it no eaſie task to obſerve the multitude of *devices* in our *deceitful hearts.*

Then there is the way of the Tongue, to which the Pſalmiſt ſaid he would *take heed, to avoid offending with it*, Pſ. 39. 1. So that our diſcourſes, words and expreſſions are our ways too, and to be ſeriouſly thought on and remarked, that we may *keep our tongue from evil, and our lips that they ſpeak no guile, ſince by our words we ſhall be juſtified or condemned.*

Thirdly, There is a way of the actions, as we find it in *Job* 34. 11. *the work of a man ſhall he render unto him, and cauſe every man to find according to his ways.* For which reaſon we are exhorted to *make our ways and our doings good.* So that all our performances, deeds, and actions are our

ways, and fall equally under our care and thought; if we would obtain the *bleſſing* promiſed to him that is *undefiled in the way.*

Now we find mention made of a two-fold way, *the way of the Righteous, and the way of the Ungodly,* Pſ. 1. 6. and theſe, with reſpect to our thoughts, are called the perfect way, and the way that is not good. Thus *David* ſays, *I will behave my ſelf wiſely in a perfect way,* Pſal. 101. 2. which he explains immediately by adding, *I will walk with a perfect heart.* And in *Pſal.* 36. 4. he tells us, *the wicked deviſeth miſchief upon his Bed,* which he calls *ſetting himſelf in a way that is not good.*

In reference to our Words, they are called the *way of Truth* and the *way of Lying,* the one of which *David* declares he hath made his *choice,* and deſires to have the other *removed from him,* Pſ. 119. 29, 30.

As they regard our Actions, they are called the way of peace, and the ſtubborn way. Thus in *Iſaiah*'s account of the evil doings of the *Jews,* that *their works were works of Iniquity, and the act of violence was in their hands, that their feet did run to evil, and made haſte to ſhed innocent bloud*; he comes to this concluſion, *the way of peace have they not known.* Iſa. 59. 8. And in the hiſtory of their Impieties under the

the Judges, it is said, *they ceased not from their evil doings, nor from their stubborn way*, Judg. 2. 19.

And now, being informed what is intended by our ways on which we are to imploy our thoughts, let us proceed to consider,

II. *What it is to think upon our ways.*

This will occur to us from the several Scripture-Phrases that are expressive of this duty. Such as *considering our ways*, *Hag.* 1. 5. *Searching and trying them.* Lam. 3. 4. *cleansing them*, Ps. 119. 9. *taking heed to them*, Ps. 39. 1. and in the Text, *thinking on them.* The force of which expressions will appear from their general use and acceptation in the Sacred Writings. As in *Job*'s affirmation, that *God knoweth vain men, he seeth wickedness also, and will consider it*, Job 11. 11. Which implys that God looks critically on the World, and imports more than a bare sight and knowledge, even a weighty and judicious observation. For too many live *without God in the World*, regardless whether their ways tend to life or death, and therefore inconsultly run into any way that is before them, especially if there is an appearance of pleasure or advantage in it. Nay though

they ſee the evil of their doings, and know the way they walk in is the high road to Deſtruction, and that *they who do ſuch things are worthy of death*, yet are ſo far from having *their own wickedneſs correct them*, or their *back-ſlidings reprove them*, ſo far from thinking ſeriouſly on the hazard, nay the certain ruine of their Souls, that they not only *do the ſame, but have pleaſure in thoſe that do them*: Which argues them of the number of thoſe fools who make it not their buſineſs to conſider, whoſe *ways are right in their own Eyes*, and therefore they go on and periſh in them.

So that 'tis not a ſlight ſuperficial knowledge, a tranſient curſory view of our converſation, but a laying it to heart, that is required; and accordingly the Command given by God to *Iſrael* to *conſider their ways*, is in the original and all the readings and criticiſms, apply your hearts and minds to them. So the Wiſeman ſends the Sluggard to be inſtructed by the Ant, to *conſider her ways, and be wiſe*, Prov. 6. 6. and the queſtion God put to Satan, *haſt thou conſidered my Servant* Job? is in the Hebrew, Haſt thou laid him to thy heart? and the word there uſed, is obſerved to be very comprehenſive, including the mind, the underſtanding, Will and Affections,

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the ſtudy, counſel, motions, and the very ſtrength of the heart. Which argues that this thinking on our ways is to be the buſineſs of our Souls, that we muſt be intent upon it, and not ſatisfie our ſelves with a glimpſe of our ways in the glaſs of our reflection, and immediately forget what the repreſentation was, for then our goodneſs will be but as a *morning cloud, or early dew*; but we muſt *ſearch and try them*, that is, make a ſtrict ſcrutiny and judicious examination of them, as the words import. And when upon this inquiry, we find we have contracted any ſullages or pollutions, then we muſt cleanſe them from that filth, and *take heed to them*, that is, keep a continual watch over them, and be ſtill upon our guard, that we be not ſurpriz'd by any new Temptation, or enticed after we have been *waſh'd*, to *return to the mire again*.

And to this end we muſt *think on them*, call them often to remembrance that by reveiwing our paſt miſcarriages, we may ſhun all occaſions of them for the future; and if we take our ſelves in the act of Deviation, *wandring from the commandments*, that we preſently *refrain our feet, and return into the right way*, and walk in it with greater diligence and Accuracy. The concluſion of all which is, that this employ-

ment of our thoughts, or thinking on our ways, is a judicious obſervation of our ſelves, which induces us ſeriouſly to weigh and intenſely to regard our courſe of life; to ponder and meditate on our thoughts, words, and actions; to inſpect them nicely, and with diſcerning apprehenſions; ſince the *deceitfulneſs of the heart*, requires our utmoſt diligence and moſt penetrating judgment, in making a true diſcovery of it; and ſince the Tongue, though but *a little member*, is yet ſuch an *unruly one*, that the taming it is a task not eaſily performed, and we are generally more eloquent in condemning its exorbitancies, than ſucceſsful in reforming them. Laſtly, ſince our actions are ſo light and petulant, that they oftentimes eſcape our greateſt caution and advertency, and therefore had need of ſuch a Guardian to reſtrain and check their numerous irregularities.

For this conſiderate thinking on our ways, ſeparates and diſcriminates things that are confuſedly huddled up together; it gathers and collects thoſe that are ſcattered and diſperſed; it traces and finds out truth; examines likelyhoods and appearances; and diſcovers and explores pretences that are feigned and varniſhed. This is it that preordains what is to be

done,

done, revolves what is already acted, governs the Affections, reſtrains exceſs, and betters and improves our lives in all reſpects.

So that if we take the meaſure of this excellent Chriſtian duty and employment of thinking on our ways, we ſhall eaſily perceive its vaſt extent, that it's an Act of the practical underſtanding, whereby it ſurveys and dwells upon its own intentions, and comparing them with the rule by which they are to be directed, lays a command on the Will and Affections to put them in execution.

Now from the knowledge of what it is to think upon our ways, let us paſs on to enquire

III. *What it is that we are to think upon, and conſider in them.*

And we ſhall find our thoughts are to be exerciſed about theſe four particulars.

Firſt, *The Quality*
Secondly, *The Tendency*
Thirdly, *The Equality*
Fourthly, *The Safety*
} *Of our Ways.*

By the quality of our Ways is meant their being good or evil; we are to conſi-

der our *Converſation*, whether it's *in Heaven* or on Earth, whether our *feet run the way of God's Commandments*, or *ſtand in the way of ſinners*. Now, *the way of the Juſt is the way of Uprightneſs*, ſays the Prophet, *Iſa.* 26. 7. And if ours are ſuch, we ſhall diſcern them to be ſo by four diſtinguiſhing Characters.

Firſt. We ſhall vigorouſly oppoſe not only thoſe ſins that are more groſs and heinous, more open and bare faced, and have ſuch a loathſome deformity in themſelves, that we are frightned by the ugly Viſage from committing them; but we ſhall as heartily ſtrive and labour againſt thoſe which admit of extenuation, and are more cloſe and latent, nay which with fair and ſpecious appearances, allure us to be fond, and dote upon them.

Some Sins lie open and expoſed to the view of all men with whom we are converſant in the World, others admit no witneſſes, but God and our own hearts; thoſe being committed in the face of the Sun, are made a publick ſubject of diſcourſe; theſe, concealed within the privacy of a Cloſet, or ſome cloſe retirement, or ſever'd from the groſsneſs of an external Act, eſcape the Obſervation, and the Cenſure of Mankind.

Now a principle of Moral Prudence is ſufficient to engage us againſt thoſe of the former rank; for either a tenderneſs of our Reputation, and a regard to that Credit and Eſteem, which we have acquired, or at leaſt aſpire to in the World; or if not that, yet a dread and apprehenſion of the cognizance and ſeverity of the Laws, will reſtrain us from the guilt of Actual Theft, Adultery, or Murder, leſt we come within the reach of the Sword of Juſtice, and betray our ſelves to ſuch rigors as will add corporal puniſhment to reproach, and force the blood out of our backs, as well as bring it into our faces. But it is a noble and more exalted Principle which ſhall enable a man to ſit in judgment on himſelf, ſeverely to obſerve his own failings, remark and criticiſe upon his imperfections, and paſs an impartial condemnatory Sentence upon the pride and haughtineſs of his own heart, and the lewd diſpoſitions of his Soul to vicious and unbecoming practices, which are liable to no ſcrutiny but that of his own Conſcience and the all-ſeeing Eye of Heaven.

We know the Phariſee could boaſt, even at the Altar, and to God's very face, that his life was free from the notorious blots and ſcandals that ſtained the converſation

of

of other men, and made them black and infamous, and while he pleas'd himſelf with the thoughts of his being no *Extortioner*, or *Adulterer*, he overlooked the Pride and Arrogance that ſate enthron'd within his Soul; and had ſwoln him to that exceſs of Vanity, and made him forget that he was endeavouring to recommend himſelf to Heaven, by the ſame methods by which the Angels loſt its favour; and that the more he exalted his own perfections, the more he ſhould be abaſed; and the nearer he juſtled up to the Altar, *God would behold him the farther of.*

But the true Candidate of Heaven, the Soul that deſires to be eſpouſed to its Saviour, will not take ſo much care, or be ſo ſolicitous for *garments of Needle-work and Embroidery*, as to appear to him *all glorious within*; will be buſier to cleanſe and purifie the heart, than to *waſh the hands and platter*, and no more indulge Spiritual, than carnal vices and corruptions. For ſuch a one knows that though the one may make him more infamous among men, the other will render him as criminal and as hateful in the ſight of God, *who does not ſee as Man ſees, but tries the very heart and reins*, and through the Varniſh of a *painted Sepulchre*, diſcerns the *rottenneſs within*;

within; and hates the Impoſtor that would abuſe him with a ſpecious outſide only, and obtrude the Devil upon him in the *reſemblance of an Angel of light.*

And for this reaſon it was, our Saviour told his Diſciples that *their righteouſneſs muſt exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees*, if they would not fall ſhort of Heaven.

A Second evidence of the Righteouſneſs of our ways will be our care to deſtroy ſin, even in its very conception; or if *luſt hath* already *conceived*, to prevent as much as we can, its *bringing* forth. We ſhall think our ſelves diſloyal and unjuſt to God, as well as injurious and cruel to our Souls, if we favour the growth, and do not oppoſe the increaſe of the greateſt enemy to both. We ſhall not divide our ſervice between *God* and *Mammon*, nor give up our ſelves to Heaven, like *Naaman*, with reſerves. Nor ſhall we, like *Saul*, diſobey his poſitive commands, under a pretence of Sacrificing to him, when indeed it is to our luſts.

Should Sin aſſume *Lot*'s plea for *Zoar*, in its own excuſe, and urge its *littleneſs*, we ſhall be ready to remember that the Majeſty againſt whom it is committed is great, and ſo will its puniſhment be too; that

that the cloud whoſe firſt appearance was no bigger than a *hand breadth*, before time had much encreaſed its age, was ſo enlarged, that it became a Vizard on the face of Heaven; And the Devil who tempted the Womau in the leſs terrible reſemblance of a *Serpent*, proves a *Dragon* in the Revelation ready to *devour her off-ſpring*.

Nor need we have recourſe to any thing, but our own reading and experience to inform us what conſuming fires are kindled from little ſparks, or how a whole *lump of dough is ſoured and tainted* by a *piece of Leaven*. And therefore we ſhall call with the Spouſe to *take the little Foxes that ſpoil the Vines*, Cant. 2. 15. knowing how great the danger is of indulging petty ſins; for a child received into a houſe may open the door to thoſe that are adult in villany, as well as years, and while we are tender of giving a repulſe to ſin in its firſt addreſs, we do not conſider by what inſenſible approaches it may gain upon us, and engage us beyond the power of giving it a Divorce. Nor do we know when once our feet begin to ſlip, and we are going down the precipice, with what an impetuous motion we ſhall fall, and how unable we ſhall be to ſtop till we are at the bottom,

tom, and from a leiſurely gradation in ſin at firſt, be hurried on in time to *commit all impiety with greedineſs.*

When the man of God told *Hazael* with tears what evil he would do to *Iſrael*, he replyed, *Is thy Servant a Dog that he ſhould do this great thing?* and then abhorr'd the thought of what ſoon after he had no reluctancy to act, 2 *King.* 8. 13. And there have been many whoſe chaſte ears would be grated with the ſound of an immodeſt word, and yet afterwards have not only liſtned to, but took delight in ſuch diſcourſes, and fallen into a practice of debauchery, till they have vyed Lewdneſs with the moſt common Proſtitute.

Now would ſuch but think upon their ways, look a while into themſelves and conſider what an alteration they find there, they would be aſtoniſhed to diſcover from what modeſt and virtuous beginnings they have arrived at ſuch an extream of Impudence. Of this we have a deplorable Inſtance in King *David*, had he ſtrenuouſly oppoſed this Sin in its infant weakneſs, when it betray'd it ſelf only in a wanton glance on naked *Bathſheba*, he had not proceeded to defile *Uriah*'s Bed, nor his own Soul, by an adulterous

Act;

Act; he had not ſtained his hands, nor made his Conſcience foul, with the guilt of blood; he had not entailed a Sword upon his family to ſucceeding generations; nor been the unhappy example to caution, and inform the world how far Sin will improve its conqueſts, and our yielding to Satan's firſt temptations, give him a power over us to *lead us Captive at his will.*

If then we would preſerve our liberty, and maintain our Innocence, we muſt keep us *far from an evil matter*, and ſhun not only the occaſions, but the very *appearances of Evil.* But if we cannot keep at ſo deſired a diſtance from ſin, as to be exempt from a ſenſe of its firſt motions in us, yet let us believe our ſelves obliged as well to daſh in pieces the *Children of Edom* as to incounter with the mighty *Sons of Anack.*

A third Character of the Righteouſneſs of our ways, will be, that when we are imployed in holy Duties and the Service of Religion, we have not only regard to the matter of it, but the manner too, in which we ſhould perform it. That we do not content our ſelves with the labour of our lips when we pray, and ſo honour God only with them, while our hearts are

at

at a diſtance from him: but that we pray with all humility and devotion, conſidering our addreſſes are made to an Omnipotent Being, whoſe ſeat and reſidence *is in Heaven*, and who knows our thoughts as perfectly, as he ſees our actions; that we endeavour therefore to add faith and fervency to our prayers, that being raiſed upon thoſe wings they may be able to aſcend to the Throne of Grace; that we pray as thoſe who have a deep ſence and feeling of the neceſſities with which we are preſs'd, and are weary of the burden under which we groan; as thoſe that know the ineſtimable worth of Souls, and value them in proportion to it; that we put up ſtrong cries and earneſt ſupplications, as knowing that while we are in our journey to the ſpiritual land of promiſe, we have a Sea and a Wilderneſs to paſs, thirſt and hunger to endure, and enemies, and thoſe Giants too, to conquer; ſince *we wreſtle not againſt fleſh and blood, but againſt Principalities and Powers, againſt the Rulers of the darkneſs of this World, and againſt Spiritual Wickedneſſes in high places*, and therefore muſt not relye on our own ſtrength and abilities, but ſhould intereſt Heaven in the quarrel, which of our ſelves we are not able to maintain. Or when

when we come into the houſe of God, to hear his Sacred Oracles deliver'd, that we give our attention to them with affection and hearty Zeal, having our Souls exalted to meet the pleaſing Embaſſie for which they thirſt, with ſuch arder and allowable tranſports, as are fit for the reception of a meſſage ſent from heaven, and of the greateſt importance to our ſelves; a meſſage wherein we are invited to participate of the joys and glories of life Eternal, and called to the poſſeſſion of *an inheritance with the Saints in light.*

And as in praying and hearing, ſo in all other duties of Religion, we muſt take care to worſhip God *in Spirit and in truth*; but if we only render the ſumm and number in our devotional performances, without endeavouring after ſincerity of intention, heat and vigour, life and ſtrength in their diſcharge, this is not worſhipping God in truth, but mocking him with a falſe appearance. For externals in Religion, the labour of the lip and lungs, are all dead works, if ſeparate from that holy frame and temper of mind which animates and enlivens them, and prayers though offered with *the tongue of Men and Angels*, are as inſignificant as the noiſe of *ſounding Braſs, or tinkling Cymbals*, without

out the fervour of divine *Charity* to actuate and inſpirit them.

The fourth Character of the righteouſneſs of our ways will be our not acquieſcing in any preſent attainments of Grace, or the heighth and meaſure we have already reached, but that *forgeting thoſe things which are behind, and reaching forth to thoſe which are before*, we *preſs forward towards the mark, for the prize of our high calling in Chriſt Jeſus.*

Men too frequently betray a canine inſatiable appetite in the purſuit and acquiſition of the things below, they are *Greedy Dogs that can never have enough:* nor is it ſtrange, ſince the encreaſe of their enjoyments, ſerves but to render them more Ravenous. We find many, who, like the rich Fool in the Goſpel, want ſtowage for their abundance; but few or none that even then think of *taking Reſt*, but are as anxiouſly buſie and ſolicitous as ever. Such is their impatience and eagerneſs to *add field to field*, and enlarge the bounds of their poſſeſſions, that no Geometry can meaſure the vaſt extent of their deſires.

Were it poſſible to find a man ſo ſatiated with pleaſures, ſo glutted with honours, as to own he had enough, the world

could not preſent us any thing ſo ſtrange and rare, ſo worthy of our admiration; But we find many of his temper, who thought the limits of the world too narrow for him, and wept that they did not allow him to extend his conqueſts farther: and it is not novel to hear others rail at Nature, and vainly ſpend their time in quarrelling with the ſhortneſs of it, as ſerving only to tantalize the Appetite with a view of pleaſures not to be enjoyed; to give them a *Piſgah* proſpect of the Land *flowing with Milk and honey*, but to cut them off before they arrive to taſte it.

And ſhall ſuch empty vanities, calculated only for a day, like *Jonah*'s Gourd, and which *periſh in the uſing*, put our thoughts upon the tenters, and rack our deſires with reſtleſs and unſatisfied longings, while we eaſily content our ſelves with the minuteſt portion of Grace, and never are at the trouble of endeavouring to encreaſe our ſtock? Shall we think all the mean, ignoble methods of acquiſt neither too many, nor too difficult to procure ſome little wealth that does impoveriſh, or ſome petty honour that enſlaves us; and yet believe a lazy wiſh, a faint and languiſhing velleity, to be a prodigal expence,

expence, an unreaſonable price for Heaven? *The path of the Juſt is as the ſhining light, which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day*, Prov. 4. 18. The good man is ever in progreſſion, bettering himſelf, improving his Graces, and advancing daily towards the height and Meridian of Chriſtianity, he gives diligence to *add to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge*, and ſo goes on *from ſtrength to ſtrength*, till he grows to *a perfect man*, and attains *the meaſure of the Stature of the fulneſs of Chriſt.* He cannot allow himſelf to be a Stationary in his Chriſtian Race, and believes he is retrograde, if not in a progreſſive motion. But apply's *Seneca*'s expreſſion of Philoſophy to Grace, and thinks there is no difference between intermiſſion, and forſaking, ſince from the moment of its interruption, it will recur, like a Spring, to its firſt ſtate.

We ſhould be modeſt to impiety, to ſuffer others to outſtrip us in this courſe, the very example of whoſe ſpeed, ſhould teach us to mend our pace, and follow in our own proceedings, the pattern we receive from theirs. And by *ſo running*, we ſhall *obtain the Crown* that is ſet before us.

But if we loiter by the way, we ſhall not reach the Goal, for our Chriſtian Courſe is not limited, like the Sea, with bounds which it muſt not exceed, nor are there any fixed terms preſcribed to the magnitude of the Spiritual, as to that of the Natural Man; becauſe Spiritual Habits and Graces, if they do not encreaſe by exerciſe, will decreaſe and dwindle into nothing by deſuetude and diſcontinuance.

And if we conſider at what an incredible diſtance they are from Perfection, who have made the neareſt approaches to it, we ſhall find room enough for the utmoſt of our endeavours, for the way is long, the journey is from Earth to Heaven, and beſides other inconveniences, it is a narrow and rugged path, nor do we know how little time we have allotted us to go this Pilgrimage, and cannot think that we have leiſure to miſ-ſpend in ſtanding idle, when we ſhould be in greateſt haſte.

Neither do we know but that if we ſtay to *look back to Sodom*, when we ſhould *eſcape for our lives to Zoar*, we may be arreſted in the inſtant like her that did ſo, and not permitted to go farther. There is this advantage gained by aiming at the heighth and ἀκμὴ of perfection, that though we

we fail of ſucceſs in our attempt, and fall ſhort of the lofty flights of Virtue and Religion; yet by endeavouring to reach them, we ſhall ſoar to a pitch above the common Sphere of Men, and ſhall find a recompence for our labour, like him that dug his field in expectation of a treaſure, who, though he miſt of that, was inriched by the cultivation of his ground. Beſides, we muſt conſider, that though the meaneſt degrees of Grace want not their ſhare of the divine approbation, yet they are only the more exalted meaſures that receive applauſe, and are crown'd with extraordinary Encomiums.

And this conſideration ſhould make us ſtill diſſatisfied with our preſent ſtate of Grace, and that diſſatisfaction ſhould put us upon the ſearch after more ſublime perfections; for if we once think we have enough, we ſhall ceaſe from endeavouring after more, and, like the Reubenites, *take up our reſt* on the wrong ſide of *Jordan*, ſhort of the promiſed Land.

From the Quality of our Ways and the Characters by which we may diſcern it, we come to the ſecond conſiderable,

Their Tendency, that is, whether we ſo run our Chriſtian Race, as that we ſhall obtain the Prize, or inſtead of a

Crown meet ruin and deſtruction in the end.

This is a matter of no trivial conſequence, but of weighty moment and importance, a matter that deſerves our moſt ſerious thought and conſideration, for without this we may be miſerably miſtaken in our courſe, and diſappointed of our hope, ſince that *way may ſeem right to us, the end whereof is the way of Death.* Now that we may not be deceived, the Holy Ghoſt hath ſet before us *life and death, and good and evil,* he has chalked us out the direct road to happineſs, and made it ſo plain and diſcernable, that unleſs we will, we cannot go aſtray. Nay we have him always telling us, *this is the Way*, and exhorting us to *walk in it*, and as he encourages us in our journey to keep the right way, and quickens our ſpeed, by the glorious proſpect at our journeys end, ſo he cautions us to avoid the Path that leads to Death, by a diſmal repreſentation of the miſery to which it tends, aſſuring us that *the Unrighteous ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God*, and who they are, appears in that black liſt the Apoſtle gives us of them, 1 *Cor.* 6. 9. *Fornicators, Adulterers, Idolaters, Thieves, Drunkards, Revilers, Covetous Perſons*, and *Extortioners*,

tortioners. Theſe he tells us ſhall be excluded from *Heaven*, and that we may not miſtake, or be abuſed in a buſineſs of this conſequence, he uſhers in his aſſertion with a cautionary admonition not to be *deceived*; of which we are in continual danger, both by the deceitfulneſs of ſin it ſelf in impoſing on us, and of our own hearts too, in conſenting to the cheat. For we are not ſo much fooled and put upon by the ſpecious pretences and deluſory appearances of ſin, as by our own eaſineſs and credulity; we would have it to be that pleaſing agreeable thing which its fallacious inſinuations render it, and therefore readily give credit to them. Nor could we be ſo ſoon betrayed, if we were not conſpirators againſt our ſelves, the Tempter has no better inſtruments to prevail upon us than our own vicious inclinations, which he employs on that deſign, as he made uſe of the Woman that was taken from *Adam*'s ſide, and finds them like her, too forward to aſſiſt him in his attempts to ruine us; for we become unfaithful to our ſelves, and by diſcovering, as *Sampſon* did, wherein our ſtrength conſiſts, the Devil comes upon us, and having deprived us of the only defence we have againſt him, condemns us to a drudg-

ery worſe than *Grinding* in the Philiſtine *Mills.* Nor is it likely we ſhould avoid it, ſince though we ſo readily incline our ears to his ſuggeſtions, we ſtop them, and are as deaf, as the Pſalmiſt's *Adder*, to the *voice of* a better *Charmer:* and though the poſitive Declarations of God's Holy Word have denounced heavy curſes againſt the *workers of iniquity*, ſuch as excluſion from the joys of Heaven, and not only ſo, but a perpetual condemnation to the miſeries of Hell; though the *Oppreſſor* hears a dreadful *Woe* thundred againſt his injuſtice; though the Drunkard is aſſured *that death is in the pot*; though the Reviler is informed that *his religion is vain*, and *that ſharp arrows of the Mighty, with coals of Juniper*, are what his Tongue deſerves; though the Adulterer is told that he forfeits his claim to Heaven, and is of that unhappy company whom *God will judge*; and though we have ſufficient warning given us, that theſe courſes have a direct tendency to everlaſting ruine, and will bring our Souls under the juſt wrath of an incenſed and angry Judge, and the irrevocable ſentence of damnation; and that whoever hath his feet in ſuch paths, ſhall, without a quick and ſeaſonable return, fall into ſo ſteep a Precipice, a pit ſo fatally deep, that he muſt never hope

hope to be delivered from it: yet notwithſtanding this, we are ſo brutiſh and ſelf-willed, to prefer our own conceptions, though never ſo wrong and falſe, before the Sacred Word of Truth it ſelf, and to gratifie the luſtings of our fleſh, to the apparent hazard of our Souls. To prevent whoſe ruine, and make better proviſion for their ſafety, it would be prudence, in all our ways, to revolve often in our thoughts, ſomething like the Inſcription over the door of the Roman Senate-Houſe, to make us as provident for our Souls, as that Aſſembly was for the Commonwealth, to ſee that they receive no damage.

And this we ſhould not fail in regard of their greater excellency and worth above all other things that have relation to us, in reſpect of their original and duration.

Their deſcent was *from above*, from the Father of *Spirits and of Lights*, it was he breathed into us that *breath of life* without which our bodies are but inſignificant lumps of earth, and have nothing to diſcriminate them from thoſe of *Beaſts that periſh*; for they ſhall equally return to the duſt from whence they deriv'd their beings, and lye undiſtinguiſhed in their heaps of ruine.

But

But our Souls are ſubject to no ſuch frailties, nothing can deſtroy their perpetuity, nor is any Republic ſo long-lived, much leſs our Bodies, or the more fading pleaſures that indulge them, to the prejudice of our Souls; yet we are ſo nicely tender of thoſe mortal parts, which muſt be captive to the grave, and a prey for corruption to devour, that we will not expoſe them to a guſt of air that may impair their health, or haſten their diſſolution: how much greater reaſon then have we to be rather apprehenſive of what may endanger our more ineſtimable Souls, and to manifeſt a ſuitable caution for their ſafety, ſince he that neglects his body is only careleſs of a frail and periſhing houſe, that is not worth his care, but he that is regardleſs of his Soul, is truly wanting to himſelf?

From the Tendency of our Ways, we come to the Third thing conſiderable in them to employ our thoughts, and that is their Equality, by which is meant, their conſonancy and agreement with thoſe things which ought to influence and direct them.

We are apt to call the *Way of the Lord unequal*, when the inequality is only in our own, and it ſeems ſo to us (as a ſtick held in a River appears crooked) not through

a

a defect in them, but in our judgment and apprehenſion. Now to make a right eſtimate, and paſs a juſt cenſure on the Equality of our ways, we muſt conſider them in four reſpects.

Firſt, How they ſuit with God's diſpenſations to his Church and People.

The Church is *the body of Chriſt*, of which, if we have any part in him, we are all *fellow-members*, and ſhould have *the ſame care one for another*, ſo as to ſympathize in each others ſufferings, and rejoyce in each others honour. That our brethren may not upbraid us with our careleſs diſregard to their circumſtances, *that they have piped to us, and we have not danced*, and when they *mourned to us, we did not weep.*

It was a memorable generoſity in *Uriah*, to refuſe the neceſſary, as well as allowable conveniencies of his houſe, the refreſhments of food and ſleep, while *the Ark, and Iſrael, and Judah abode in Tents, and the General and the Servants of the King*, were encamped in the open fields, expoſed to all the injuries of the Weather, and harraſſed with the fatigue and hardſhips of a Campaigne. 2 *Sam.* 11. 11. And when good *Nehemiah* heard the tragical Narrative of *Jeruſalem*'s deſolation, the afflictions of his Soul were viſible in his

his face, and the King read in the ſadneſs and ſolemnity of his Conntenance, the legible characters of that grief that poſſeſſed his heart, and he juſtifies the Mourning in his Viſage, by repeating the ſad occaſion, thinking no ſigns of grief could be condemned in him, when *the City, the place of his Father's Sepulchre lay waſte, and the Gates thereof were conſumed with fire. Neh.* 2. 2, 3.

When the *Elders of the daughters of Sion ſate upon the ground*, who could blame the Prophet for making it matter of complaint? nor did they unreaſonably affect that poſture of ſitting there, ſince the lofty Walls and ſtately Towers of *Sion* were levelled with it. Or was *Iſaiah* in the wrong, when foretelling *the day of treading down in the Valley of Viſion*, which he calls *the day of trouble and perplexity from the Lord God of Hoſts*, he thinks no expreſſions of grief too pathetick to bewail the calamity, and that he had reaſon to weep bitterly, and forbid all attempts to aſſwage his ſorrows, *becauſe of the ſpoiling of the Daughter of his people.* Iſa. 22. 4, 5.

If we look on *Iſrael* in Captivity, *by the Rivers of Babylon*, we ſhall find them *weeping* at the *remembrance of Sion*, and it was a becoming ſorrow ſuited to their unhappy cir-

circumſtances; but how little decorum do they obſerve, and how unſuitable are their ways to God's in his diſpenſations to his Church and People, who *lye upon beds of Ivory, and ſtretch themſelves upon their Couches; who chant to the ſound of the Viol, and invent themſelves Inſtruments of Muſick; that drink Wine in bowls, and anoint themſelves with the chief Ointments, but are not grieved for the afflictions of Joſeph.* Amos 6. 4, 5, 6. Well do they deſerve a *Woe*, who are thus *at eaſe in Sion*, while the Lord hath *cover'd it with a Cloud of his fierce Anger.* And are like *Ahaſhuerus* and his favourite *Haman* who ſate down to *drink*, while *the City Shuſhan was perplexed.* A blamable circumſtance in their behaviour, and an unſeaſonable allowance of themſelves in mirth and jollity, and unlike his temper, who is *afflicted in all the afflictions of his People.* Whoſe example Chriſtians ſhould imitate as perſons of publick Spirits, and have ſo quick a ſenſe of the calamities and ſufferings of their brethren, as to be able to ſay with the Apoſtle, *who is afflicted, and I burn not?* 2. Cor. 11. 29. It is not a ſeaſon for men *to ſeek great things for themſelves*, when God is *laying waſte*, breaking down what he had built, and plucking up what he had planted. He who ſits an idle

idle unconcerned ſpectator, when his neighbours houſe is on fire, may ſoon have occaſion to imploy his greateſt induſtry to ſave his own, and therefore ought to give his beſt aſſiſtance to ſuppreſs the flame, before it comes near enough to do him any prejudice. And if we are inſenſible and have no ſtirrings of compaſſion for our Brethren in diſtreſs, this unbecoming diſregard may provoke God to make us ſharers in that miſery for which we had no ſence of pity, while it was foreign to us. We are told that *to every thing there is a ſeaſon, and a time to every purpoſe under Heaven*, Eccleſ. 3. 1. *a time to weep, and a time to laugh*; and ſure the time to weep muſt be the time of adverſity and tribulation, and he that *laughs in the houſe of mourning*, is guilty of rudeneſs and inhumanity, as well as of folly and inconſideration. What cenſure then do men deſerve, who have no concern for the Schiſms and breaches in the Church of Chriſt, and can look on its *diviſions* without any *thoughts of heart?* who ſee War and deſolation threatning to invade their Country, while homebred diſcords weaken and expoſe it, and yet *care for none of all theſe things*. But inſtead of endeavouring to compoſe the differences, foment and cheriſh them,

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inſtead of cementing the breaches, widen and enlarge them? Who while their brethren are *jeoparding their lives in the high places of the field, abide among the Sheep folds, to hear the bleating of the flocks!* who feaſt on the days appointed for humiliation, and inſtead of imitating *Iſrael* in hanging up their Harps, call loudeſt for them, and entertain their ears with the voice of melody?

They muſt ſure be putrid and corrupted members that have ſo little ſenſe of what the body feels, and have no more relation to it than a Glaſs Eye or a Wooden Leg, nor ſerve half ſo much for uſe or ornament.

But though it is *nothing* to theſe men, what is done to God's Church and People, and they paſs by as regardleſs of the *affliction wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Sion in the day of his fierce anger*, as the Prieſt and Levite did of the wounded Travellor; It is our duty not to *forget Jeruſalem*, our *Souls* muſt *cleave to the duſt*, when we find her *honour laid in it*, our tongues be dumb, and *our right hands forget their cunning*, if we pray not *for the peace of Jeruſalem*, if we *prefer it not above our chief joy*.

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The ſecond thing we are to think on in the Equality of our Ways, is their agreement with God's ways and diſpenſations towards our ſelves. Which are viſible in his Mercies and his Judgments.

It was the Pſalmiſt's inquiry *what he ſhould render to the Lord for all his benefits*, Pſ. 116. 12. and it ſhould be our conſideration, what returns we have made, how anſwerable to God's dealings with us, the mercies with which he hath imbraced us on every ſide, whether ſpiritual or temporal. If, as he hath beſtowod his Talents liberally on us, we have made as large improvements of thoſe plentiful receits, and as we have been furniſhed with various, excellent, and continued means of Grace; ſo have happily grown, and made a ſucceſsful progreſs in it, not neglecting the opportunities vouchſafed us.

Or if, as he hath ſet us up as ſo many living monuments of his mercies; ſo we have not been backward to celebrate and proclaim them, to declare what he hath *done for our Souls*: Again, If as we have been the ſubjects of many unexpected deliverances and as *Brands ſnatched out of the fire* of that calamity wherein others have been conſumed; ſo we have made a due acknowledgment of praiſe and obedience:

ence: And laſtly, if, as he hath *proſper'd the works of our hands upon us*, and *bleſſed our ſubſtance with encreaſe*, we have bin *rich towards him*, in works of Piety and Charity, *the Sacrifices with which he is pleaſed:* then our ways have been equal in their ſuitableneſs to his. Now if we ſearch the Chronicles of our own Hiſtory, we ſhall find all theſe benefits upon record, and ſurely when theſe favours and this goodneſs of God are there repreſented to us, we ſhall not paſs them over, without inquiring, as *Ahaſuerus* did upon hearing the account of *Mordecai*'s good ſervice, *What hath been done to him for this?* Eſth. 6. 3. have we *given him the honour due unto his name?* have we *taken the Cup of Salvation and called upon it?* have we *offered him the Sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay'd our vows unto him?* Such returns he looks for from us, and if we do not improve to advantage the Grace and goodneſs which his bounty hath richly diſpenſed to us, we fruſtrate his deſign, and diſappoint his expectations, who requires a plentiful Harveſt where he hath been a liberal Sower, and that we ſhould *put his Talents to the Exchangers*, and return him *his own with Uſury*, *Mat.* 25. 27.

Wheu he had *fenced his Vineyard* and *gathered out the ſtones thereof*, and *planted it with the choiceſt Vine*, he looked that it ſhould *bring forth Grapes*; and when he found that it *brought forth wild Grapes*, was it not reaſonable that he ſhould *take away the Hedge thereof, and let it be eaten up, and take away the Wall thereof, and let it be trodden down!* And when God hath ſet a hedge of protection and preſervation about us; when his hand hath been *no way ſtraitned towards us*; but his favours have been renewed upon us as conſtantly as the ſeveral moments of our lives have ſucceeded to each other: he waits for ſomething from us that may anſwer his care and pains. But if we prove like the Fig-tree in his Vineyard, when he came and ſought fruit thereon, and found none; ſhall he not ſentence us to be *cut down from cumbering his ground?* What can we ſuppoſe to be the reaſon why we were *brought out of darkneſs into his marvelous light*, but that we ſhould by an extraordinary ſplendor of our lives, enhanſe his glory who vouchſafed us that illumination? By inſtating us in *the glorious liberty of the Sons of God*, he intended we ſhould be ſo far ſenſible of that freedom, and value it at ſo juſt a rate, as not to repeat the Captivity, and enſlave

ſlave our ſelves again to our own luſts, nor be anew *entangled* in that intolerable *bondage.*

But if in times of light and ſplendor under the Goſpel, we live in darkneſs, and continue in the practice of ſuch immoralities as would put a heathen to the bluſh; if we *grope our way* when *the Day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us*; and ſtumble when it is made ſmooth and plain before us; we are guilty of a baſeneſs which we cenſure and condemn in our fellow creatures, while we think our ſelves defrauded of the benefit which we might in juſtice have expected from them.

Thus if we have planted a tree in a fertile ſoil, where its roots may ſpread themſelves abroad in the fatteſt earth, and have the vicinity of refreſhing Streams to promote their growth; and notwithſtanding theſe advantages, we find it does not *bring forth fruit in its due ſeaſon*, and only cloaths its branches with uſeleſs leaves; we concludes it deſerves the Axe for mocking our care and induſtry. Or if we meet with the leanneſs of *Pharaoh*'s Kine upon thoſe which we keep in our choiceſt Paſtures, are we not vexed at the diſappointment of our hopes, and ready to deafen every ear with our complaints? and what

do we elſe, while we become thus querulous, but *condemn* our ſelves *out of our own mouths?* and indeed if we find the ſame unfruitful leanneſs in our ſelves, though ſeated in the ſame advantages, we ſhould be very partial not to paſs an equal cenſure on a cauſe no leſs deſerving it.

And as Spiritual, ſo Temporal mercies require the grateful acknowledgment of our lives in obeying and praiſing the Author of them, becauſe it is a return which he expects. When he expoſtulates with *David* by his Prophet, for deſpiſing the commandment of the Lord, and doing evil in his ſight, he enumerates the great things which he had done for him, *the anointing him King over Iſrael, and delivering him out of the hand of Saul, the giving him his Maſters Houſe, and his Maſters Wives into his boſom.* 2 Sam. 12. 7. 8. and he reminds him of his bounty not to upbraid him with it, but to make him ſenſible how that ſhould have influenced his actions, and reſtrained him from offending a God, who had ſo obliged and loaded him with benefits. And we find it recorded for an aggravation of the Iſraelites baſe ingratitude, that when God delivered them out of *Egypt, and prepared a table for them in the Wilderneſs,* and fed them

them with a diet that was neither ſpare, nor mean, for he gave them *meat enough*, and filled them *with the bread of Heaven*; yet they murmured while it was in their mouths, their deſires were more to the *fleſh-pots of Egypt*, than to the *food of Angels*, and they prefered the ſlavery of the *Brick-Kilnes* for the ſake of the *Leeks and Onions*, before the freedom of God's Service with all its advantages and rewards.

By the inequality of *Iſraels* ways in this particular, we may take meaſure of our own, and perhaps we ſhall find our carriage as reproveable in circumſtances of a near affinity with theirs, that though we have been freed from our grievances and oppreſſions under a *King that knew not Joſeph*, and ſit every man *under his own Vine, and under his own Fig-tree*, enjoying the Liberty and Property we admire, and have no *leading into Captivity among us*; yet we do not ceaſe from unjuſt *complaining in our Streets*, and ſlight the bleſſing of being *in ſuch a Caſe*, the happineſs of having *the Lord for our God*. We may juſtly fear that ſuch neglects may provoke him to recall his mercies, of which we are not worthy, and pour his judgments, which we rather deſerve, upon us. And if we

ſhouad at any time feel the laſhes of his *Rod*, which is proper for the *backs* of ſuch inconſiderate *fools*, our puniſhment muſt work that wiſdom and amendment in us, which our good uſage could not effect. But if we *turn not unto him that ſmiteth us*, neither *ſeek the Lord of Hoſts*, if he hath *ſtricken us*, but we *have not grieved*, if he hath *conſumed us*, but we have *refuſed to receive correction*; but have made our *faces harder than a Rock*, and have *refuſed to return*; will it not be truly ſaid of us that we are *poor*, that we are *fooliſh*, that we *know not the way of the Lord, nor the Judgment of our God?* But if we return to him, and repent of thoſe impieties for which we were chaſtiſed, our ways will be equal and acceptable to him, and we ſhall receive this advantage by their being ſo, that as *he hath torn us, he will heal us*, as *he hath ſmitten us, he will bind us up.*

The third particular in which the Equality of our Ways is to be diſcerned, is the correſpondency of our preſent courſe of life, with the primary actings of Grace and Holineſs in us.

When firſt God *brings Mens Souls out of Priſon*, and they find the Shackles of their Spiritual Bondage broken, and the fetters of that diſmal Captivity newly fallen from

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their feet; when they are *lifted out of the mire* in which they once *ſtuck faſt*, and from an Egyptian darkneſs are brought into the light of *Goſhen*; and when the ſenſe of this *loving kindneſs of the Lord* lies freſh upon their Souls, they are like the fountain of the Sun in *Jupiter Hammon*'s Temple, at the firſt eruption of the morning light, warm with love and gratitude, but, like that, abate of their fervour, as the heat of the day encreaſes. Theſe men *run well* at their firſt ſetting forth, and are eager to obtain the prize, but the eſteem of it leſſens by the way, and they grow faint and weary in the middle of the Race.

Now we muſt take heed that this be not our condition, we muſt *remember the days of old*, and if we find there was once a time when we could welcome all the ſufferings which we endur'd for the ſake of Chriſt, and counted them a new addition to our honours; when we believed the *tryals of cruel mockings and ſcourgings, yea moreover of Bonds and Impriſonment*, the greateſt illuſtrations of our Virtue, and proofs of our being ſuch, *of whom the world was not worthy*; a time when our hearts were ready to echo to every command from Heaven, and cry, *lo I come to do thy*

will, O God: when our *love* was ſo refined and perfect, that it retained no mixture, no allay of *fear*; when no difficulties or dangers could make us ſtart aſide out of the way of righteouſneſs, but we *took patiently the ſpoiling of our goods*, and all imaginable injuries and indignities for the ſake of the Goſpel, and were ready to part with our deareſt pledges and enjoyments, to follow our Saviour to his Croſs: And if we do not now perceive thoſe holy fires ſtill flaming in our breaſts; if the love of Chriſt hath not ſtill ſuch a conſtraining power, *that many waters* cannot allay the ardor, much leſs *quench* the fire of our affection towards him; we ſhall have reaſon to conclude that we are fallen into the inconſtancy of the Church of *Epheſus* and *have left our firſt love*, Rev. 2. 4.

But we are in no wiſe to allow our ſelves to be thus altered from our original perfection, and inſtead of excelling the pattern we ſet our ſelves at firſt, fail in our imitation of it. And therefore we are to *remember from whence we are fallen*, and endeavour to retrieve our ſelves and regain our primeval Character by *doing our firſt works*.

And to this end we muſt enquire by what means it comes to paſs, that our Zeal cools, and our deſires run in a lower chanel; that our activity and ſtrength in the exerciſes of holy living, is enfeebled and benumb'd, into a Spiritual laſineſs and debility: How we have been *bewitched* to *forſake the Truth*, and divide our affections between God and Mammon; and why, having *begun in the Spirit*, we ſhould go ſo far out of our way, to *end in the Fleſh*, as if that could make us perfect. And when we have found *the weight* that hinders us to run as well as we did at firſt, let us *lay it aſide*, and *the ſin that does ſo eaſily beſet us, and run with patience the Race that is ſet before us.*

We muſt think on the unreaſonableneſs of our deſiſting from a work in which we have engaged upon ſuch grounds and inducements as are ſtill as ſtrong and as encouraging as ever.

Why ſhould we turn back ſince in our little progreſs in holineſs, we have not met with any thing to raiſe a ſuſpition in us that we have miſtook our way, or to make us repent of our former forwardneſs? Are not the Service of Jeſus Chriſt, which is perfect freedom; the *continual feaſt* of a *good Conſcience*; the *dwelling under the de-*

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fence of the moſt high, and abiding under the ſhadow of the Almighty; as profitable and pleaſant, as ſafe and deſirable, as they have been repreſented to us? Is the Sample we have ſeen of the Cluſters of *Canaan*, ſuch as gives us occaſion to deſpiſe the Land, or *bring an ill report* on that which is indeed ſo good?

Let it not be ſaid of us that we have *changed our glory for that which doth not profit*, or forſaken the *Fountain of living Waters, and hewen out to our ſelves broken Ciſterns.* Have we ſeen no *form* or *comlineſs* in our Saviour, during our ſmall enjoyment of his preſence? or could we perceive no beanty in him, that we ſhould *deſire him* as we have done heretofore? Why ſhould we give him occaſion to expoſtulate with us as he did once with *Iſrael? O my People, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee. Teſtifie againſt me.* Mic. 6. 3. and if we can put him in remembrance of his dealing ſo with us, when we plead together, it behoves us to declare it; *that we may be juſtified.* But he hath not preſſed us to impoſſibilities; nor exacted our uſual *tale of Bricks* without giving us proportionable allowances of *Straw*; he hath not *oppreſſed our ſhoulders with heavy burdens*, which he hath not *enabled us to bear*;

bear; his *Commandments* have not been *grievous*, nor have the meaneſt of our Services met with diſproportionate rewards; But he has prevented our wiſhes, and done abundantly for us above what we were able to ask or think. And if we ſeriouſly conſider this, we ſhall be aſhamed to remit of our endeavours, or ſlacken our former diligence in the ways of Piety, but *gird up the loins of our minds*, and finiſh our courſe with the ſame alacrity, which we ſhewed in our beginning it.

And now we come to the fourth and laſt thing wherein we muſt think upon the Equality of our Ways, and that is how conſiſtent they are with our Hopes.

And truly *our hope is even in God*, that when *our houſe of this earthly Tabernacle is diſſolved*, we ſhall have *a building of God, a houſe not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.*

That there we ſhall receive *a Crown of glory that fadeth not away*, and have an eaſie entrance into *the joy of our Lord*, that *fulneſs of joy* which is in *his preſence*, and thoſe *pleaſures* which are *at his right hand for evermore.* Theſe great, theſe inconcievable Bleſſings, *ſuch as Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, nor have entred into the heart of man*, are the object of which our ambition is directed:

rected: our aſpiring thoughts, and towring hopes all aim at this perpetual felicity. And theſe, one would think, ſhould have a ſufficient prevalency to engage us in the right methods of arriving where we hope to be. The Apoſtle tells us *that every one that ſtriveth for the maſtery is temperate in all things*, 1 Cor. 9. 25. Meaning thereby not only his continence, or abſtinence from things hurtful, but a competent uſe of things neceſſary to encreaſe his ſtrength, and thoſe too obtained by a continual exerciſe. Now they of whom he ſpeaks, took this pains to obtain *a corruptible Crown*, and ſhall not we be more indefatigable in our endeavours for one that is *incorruptible?* Here we have no *abiding place*, the little ſatisfaction which they, who make this world the centre of their happineſs, find in it, argues that God never intended it for their repoſe. The *vaniety* of their deſires meets with *vexation of Spirit* in all things, and they are ſtill upon the inquiry, *who will ſhow us any good?* though in all their ſearch after what is ſubſtantially ſo, they meet with nothing but ſome ſhadows and faint reſemblances of it, which are not only deluſory phantaſms, that cannot ſatisfie them, but malignant Spectres, that invite them to their ruin. So that all the diſcovery they

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can make of happineſs, is, that it is not to be found on earth.

Now the reaſon why we can find no real ſatisfaction, is becauſe inſtead of ſtriving for maſtery over the Enemies of our Nature, we fight againſt our own Souls, and are as well the managers, as the ſeat of that war that is waged againſt our ſelves, not conſidering that God hath intended higher things for us, a Victory over, and not a Slavery to ſuch Vanities, and rewards our Conqueſt not with a fading Chaplet made of leaves, but with an immarceſſible *Crown of Glory*. This is the *Prize* for which we *ſtrive*, the Goal to which we run, and the exerciſe of Grace muſt be both the Race and Path. There is no arriving at Happineſs, but by ſuch means, whoſe purity ſhews they are of the ſame nature with their end, as the light that directs us to ſee the Sun, is congenial with the Sun it ſelf.

He that would find Heaven at his journeys end, muſt take the way that leads to it, muſt have *his converſation there*, and make Grace his road to Glory. But if we *embrace a dunghill*, who pretend to have been *brought up in Scarlet*; *if we walk in darkneſs*, who claim *an inheritance with the Saints in light*; the degeneracy of our actions

from our pretenſions, will diſcover us to be Impoſtors, and we ſhall not be allowed of for the *Sons of God, and joint-heirs with Chriſt*, becauſe we neglect to do the works which alone can juſtifie our relation to him.

St. *John* repreſenting to us what we already are, and what we may expect to be, ſhews us alſo what an influence that hope ought to have over our converſation; that *now we are the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we ſhall be, but we know that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him: for we ſhall ſee him as he is. And every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himſelf, even as he is pure.*

The promiſes of happineſs are made upon this condition, *without holineſs no man ſhall ſee God.* He that would be tranſlated to reign with him in Heaven, muſt like *Enoch*, *walk with him* on Earth. There will be no participation of his glory allowed to them who have not a reſemblance of his purity. Nay the object of our hope, the felicity which conſiſts in ſeeing and enjoying God, is loſt to the impure. His Spiritual perfections cannot be diſcerned by them, the purity of his Eſſence is not liable to their apprehenſions, he will ſeem to them no better than one of the Gods of the

the Heathens, whom they repreſented in their own figure and ſimilitude, and rendred them ſubject to the paſſions and infirmities that were predominant in themſelves.

For as it is impoſſible for men to raiſe their notions of any thing above what they underſtand; ſo wicked men have mean conceptions of God's holineſs, becauſe they make an eſtimate of it by their own, and therefore think him *ſuch a one as themſelves*. But could they be admitted to the beatifick Viſion, and allowed a clearer ſight than the dark enigmatical view they have at preſent, what pleaſure, what enjoyment would they find in it? alas none: for a Spiritual object can be no way agreeable to a carnal faculty, nor can the contemplation of God's purity, be a happineſs to thoſe whoſe delight is in uncleanneſs.

Wherefore, as the promiſe of this reward is an incitement to the love of holineſs, ſo the expectation of it can be ſatisfactory to none but thoſe who are *pure in heart*. And for this reaſon God makes the perfection of holineſs hereafter, the recompence of its initiation here. So that this will be a matter very well deſerving the employment of our thoughts and ſerious re-

reflection, whether we take the right way to obtain the accompliſhment of our hope, and lay aſide all thoſe defilements and pollutions which may obſtruct it. For this *cleanſing our ſelves from all filthineſs both of Fleſh and Spirit*, is that *perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*, which alone can entitle us to his *great and pretious promiſes*: becauſe *nothing that is unclean* can have admittance into his preſence, nor ſhall any *impure thing continue in his ſight*, *for he is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity*, and there is as little *fellowſhip between Chriſt and Belial*, as *communication between light and darkneſs*; *the new Heaven wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*, can be no proper habitation for the *workers of iniquity*. They therefore who *look for ſuch a Heaven*, muſt be *diligent* that they may be found *without ſpot and blameleſs*, the only qualification for it. 2 *Pet.* 3. 4. It is our duty, if we would entertain a reaſonable hope to partake of God's illuſtrious purity in Heaven, to make as near approaches to it as we can on Earth, by purging our ſelves from ſin, and extirpating our vices and impurities, that ſo we may become *Veſſels of Honour*, *ſanctified and meet for the Maſter's uſe*. Nor will it ſuffice us to be transformed into the reſemblance of our Lord only in what relates

lates to his more exalted State, but we muſt be aſſimilated to him in his humiliation and abaſement, upon all occaſions for it. If we would receive a Crown of Glory from his hands, we muſt ſubmit our heads to be crowned, like his, with thorns; and not ſtartle at his Croſs when it is laid upon our ſhoulders, but bear the burden as chearfully for his ſake, as he carried it for ours. We muſt *deſpiſe the ſhame* and ignominy of it, for the *joy that is ſet before us*, or elſe we muſt not hope to *ſit down with him at the right hand of the Throne of God.* For if we refuſe to endure the hardſhips to which his ſervice ſometimes expoſes us, we have no pretence to its rewards: for the way to accompany him in his triumphs, is to follow him in his ſufferings; and when we have thus *born the Image of the Earthly, we ſhall alſo bear the Image of the Heavenly.* St. *Paul* tells us, that only when *tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope*, that is the certain *hope*, which *maketh not aſhamed*, Rom. 5. 3, 4, 5. for it is a well grounded hope, and ſhall not be *diſappointed*: but what ever hope we entertain which is not the conſequence of that Climax, which is not begot by thoſe degrees, is *the hope of Hypocrites, which ſhall periſh.*

We come now to consider the Fourth thing to be thought on in our Ways, and that is, safety of them. By which is intended their being such in which we may acquiesce, and think our selves secure, and be willing to be found in them at that day when we must pass an examination of them.

We know that *we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, to give an account of all things done in the Body, whether good or evil.* Now doubtless it imports us to consider whether our ways are such as will endure this Test, whether we have supplyed our selves with *Oyl*, and *trimmed our Lamps* against the *coming of the Bridegroom*; or like the foolish Virgins, in the Parable, lose the opportunity of going in with him into the *Marriage-Chamber*, while we are seeking in vain to *buy*; and whether we have got on such a *Wedding Garment*, as will priviledge us to sit at the table with the other guests, or have neglected to provide one, and for that reason shall be excluded thence, and cast into *outer darkness.* St. *Paul* who had declared of himself that he was *touching the righteousness which is in the Law blameless*, Phil. 3. 6. yet desires to be found *at the last day in Christ, not having his own righteousness which*

which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Chriſt. He was able to challenge the World, as our Saviour did, to *convince him of Sin* in the breach of the letter of the Law, and yet durſt not rely on his own righteouſneſs, to be found in it at the day of Accounts.

He knew that *God doth not ſee as Man ſeeth*, that men are too ſuperficial in their expoſitions of the Law, and more in their obedience to it, and would overlook many failings and infirmities which could not eſcape the ſight and ſentence of that diſcerning God, *whoſe Eyes are on the Ways of Man*, and to whom, both his inward thoughts and heart, be they never ſo deep, are open. He knew that no man, how good, how innocent ſoever, could eſcape condemnation in that Judgment, if he ſhould be called to a ſtrict account for the moſt inoffenſive day of his whole life, without the Merits and Righteouſneſs of Jeſus Chriſt to plead for and excuſe him.

And if this great Apoſtle found in his very righteouſneſs, in his whiteſt innocency, and moſt unerring ſtate, ſomething which he durſt not ſtand to, what confidence ſhall weaker Chriſtians have in their own performances? and *if the Righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where then ſhall the*

Ungodly and the Sinner appear? What ſhall become of them, who from their tender infancy have been imployed in the drudgeries of Satan, and bending their courſe to Hell? whoſe unrepented ſins ſhall at that day attend them in their crimſon liveries, and be rendered heinous indeed by all the aggravating circumſtances, whereby ſin is capable of being made *exceeding ſinful?* What then ſhall the Adulterer do, who durſt not venture on his darling ſin, without the favourable ſhelter of *the twylight*, or the kind concealment of a diſguiſe; when his deeds of darkneſs ſhall be brought to light, and his nakedneſs made a *ſpectacle to Men and Angels?* If the *morning was to him as the ſhadow of death*, and a diſcovery bred ſtrange confuſion in him; then what guilty bluſhes ſhall overſpread his face, what anxious apprehenſions ſhall terrifie his Soul; when he ſees his ſecret filthineſs, which he took ſuch care to hide, made publick, and Hell fire prepared as a ſuitable puniſhment for his burning luſt? What then ſhall the prodigious Swearer do, who bids defiance to Heaven with horrid Oaths and Blaſphemies, and treats his Creator more contemptibly than he would uſe one of his inferiours, when he finds that God will not *hold him guiltleſs for take-*

takeing his name in vain? In vain indeed, ſince it redounds ſo much to the diſhonour of his Maker, ſo much to the prejudice of his Soul, without any the leaſt procurement, nay proſpect of advantage, even in his temporal intereſts?

What refuge ſhall they find, who avowedly declare againſt all religion, denying God with the very breath he gave them, and employ that reaſon by which he exalted them above all earthly creatures, to repreſent him lower than the meaneſt? Would the Drunkard be found ſitting at his Cups, with his underſtanding drowned in his liquor, when the *woe* denounced againſt them that are *mighty to drink Wine*, ſhall be ready to be put in execution? Would he who hath *greedily gained of his neighbour by extortion*, be taken with the *ſpoyle of the poor in his houſe*, when the Lord comes to enter into judgment with him? Would the Perjurer be ſurpriſed with a falſe Oath in his mouth, and the *reward of wickedneſs in his hands*, when a ſeverer curſe than that repreſented by the *flying Roll*: Zech. 5. 2, 3. ſhall be ſent to *conſume*, not his *houſe*, alone, but himſelf for ever? Or would the Murderer be caught in the inhumane act, with the

ſtains of reeking gore upon him, in that day when *God ſhall make inquiſition for blood?* Let the Hypocrite, who embraces but the ſhadow of Religion, or the Atheiſt, who derides the ſubſtance, ſay if they think they could conſent that Judgment ſhould overtake the one, impoſing upon Heaven, or the other ſetting it at defiance; when the one ſhall be *cloathed with ſhame*, for inſincerity in profeſſing religion, and the other condemned for impiety in not profeſſing it at all? when the *laſt Trumpet's* ſound ſhall ſummon *the dead to ariſe to judgment*; when *the Elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, and the Earth and all the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up*; would we willingly be found living in a deſtructive courſe of vice and wickedneſs, and not rather in the commendable practice of true piety, addreſſing our ſelves to Heaven by continual devotions, and qualifying our ſelves for it by all *holy Converſation and Godlineſs?*

There is none ſo brazen-fac'd and ſhameleſs that ſhall then endure to look upon his Judge, or be ſeen by him; no one ſo hardened in iniquity, that ſhall hear his Sentence without horror, without begging the *Mountains to fall on him* and *the Hills to cover him from the face of him that ſitteth on*

on the throne. For when *the great day of his wrath* is come, who ſhall be able to ſtand? When our Sins on one hand, ſhall ſtand ready to accuſe us, and the Devils wait as officiouſly on the other, to torment us; when Hell ſhall open its dreadful mouth to ſwallow us, and an angry Judge condemn us to it; when we ſhall ſee the World in a flame about us, and feel our Conſciences burning us within; Ah whither ſhall we flye, where it is impoſſible to be concealed, and intolerable to appear! where we ſhall ſeek refuges as vainly as we ſpent our lives, and the puniſhment of our ſins ſhall be as unalterable as our inclinations to them were.

And if our ways do not prove ſuch, when we have thought upon them, as we may expect ſafety in at this great and terrible day, we ought to endeavour quickly to make them ſo, that when *our Lord ſhall appear, we may have confidence, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming.* Theſe are the things about which we are to employ our thoughts, in the conſideration of our Ways; from which we may proceed to what muſt be their buſineſs in the Fourth place, *viz.*

IV. *What is the moſt ſeaſonable time for the exerciſe of our thoughts in this employment of thinking upon our Ways.*

This is a duty of ſuch weighty conſequence and univerſal obligation, that we cannot be *inſtant in it out of ſeaſon.* Yet there are ſome critical times, when the practice of it is more eſpecially requiſite, ſome times that call aloud on us to exert it.

Firſt, When *our Eyes wait upon the Lord,* not, as the Pſalmiſt's did, in expectation of his ſhewing mercy, but with apprehenſions of his executing ſome impending Judgments on us. 'Tis true, they are at preſent *far above out of our ſight,* and our circumſtances, in reſpect of moſt other Nations, diſcover more of Heavens indulgence, than its anger, and that God has not ſo much *a controverſie with our Land,* as a kindneſs for it.

While moſt other people are deafned with the alarms of War, within their borders, and have the Sword unſheathed among them; we, God be praiſed, only hear the rumours of thoſe hoſtilities by which they periſh, and are without the reach of the Weapons that depopulate their Countries: While the *Earth opens its mouth*

mouth upon ſome of them, and ſwallows thouſands as greedily as it did *Corah* and his Company; we live in as much ſafety on it, as if we were preſerved for its repleniſhment: While the Sea, not brooking its uſual bounds, makes violent encroachments on the Land, and overwhelms multitudes, as it once did *Pharoah* and his Hoſt, we are ſecure amidſt its waves; and like *Iſrael*, owe our protection to them: And while the Heaven brings its auxiliary forces from above, and *the fire of God* deſtroys what theſe had ſpared, as it once did *Sodom*: We are a brand reſcued from that conſumption, and live to hear in ſafety the dreadful Narrative of theſe Calamities. But may we not apprehend that *the evil day* of our affliction is not ſo *far from us*, as it ſeems, or we would *put it*, ſince it is greatly to be feared that we are as far from a juſt ſence of the mercy that exempts us from this deſtruction, as we have been from periſhing by it? or elſe what means the noiſe of thoſe crying ſins that are generally in vogue amongſt us, and have debauched our converſation. That profeſſed Atheiſm in ſcoffing at Religion, and deſpiſing the Wiſdom of fearing God, as the greateſt ſtupidity and fooliſhneſs; that cloſe hypocriſie in uſeing Religion for

for a pretence to promote our Intereſts, or cloak our Villanies? That prophane ſwearing and blaſphemy; that common drunkenneſs and riot; with a long Catalogue of other iniquities, which ought not to be *once named*, and yet are daily practiſed among us? When we think on our unſuitable returns for former deliverances; our miſimprovement of preſent mercies; our falſeneſs to our profeſſed end, and declared intentions, our cleaving to our old luſts, and the general depravation of our manners, with that irreſolution and *double-minded* wavering, that makes us *inſtable in all our ways:* When we lay all theſe together, and repreſent them to our ſerious thoughts, we may juſtly fear that the clouds over us are filled with the Vials of God's wrath, ready to be poured upon our heads, and that the leſs viſible the approach of his vengeance is, the more ſuddain it will be in ſurpriſing us, and that the longer it's defer'd, it will fall the heavier.

For where *the Harveſt is ſo ripe*, it is time to *thruſt in the Sickle.* Therefore *before the decree bring forth, and the fierce anger of the Lord paſs upon us*, it will be very opportune to think upon our Ways, and humble our ſelves after the example of *Ninivie*, that the event may be the ſame to us,

us, and that God ſeeing our works, that we turn from our evil ways, may *repent of the evil thought upon*, and not execute his vengeance on us, or may *hide us in the day of his anger.*

A Second Seaſon that ſhould put us in remembrance of our Ways, is when we feel the laſhes of the Rod and our heavenly father's hand is heavy on us. *When his Judgments are in the earth*, it is time for the *inhabitants of the World to learn righteouſneſs.* And though we now enjoy at home all the eaſe and plenty of a ſetled Peace, yet we have a deſtructive War abroad; we have enemies to encounter, who are not only envious at our proſperity, and would diſturb our quiet, but whoſe contrivances and attempts are numerous, and reſtleſs to ſubvert our happy Government, and *quench the light of our Iſrael*, our excellent Religion. Who would enſlave our Bodies to an Arbitrary Power, and our Conſcience to an Implicit Faith. And is not this a time to think upon our Ways, to ſee that we do not joyn with our enemies againſt our ſelves, and become acceſſary to our own deſtruction.

The Signal and Exemplary Piety of thoſe to whom God, for the conſummation of our happineſs, hath committed the

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Supream Authority over us, hath often ſummoned us to this duty, by injoyning ſeveral publick ſolemn hùmiliations through the Land; the neceſſary work and ſuitable buſineſs of which days, is to examine and inquire into the errors of our ways, the many tranſgreſſions and enormities of our lives; and thereupon to arraign and paſs judgment upon our ſelves before the Lord. This was the voice of God's people in times of ſuffering and calamity, *let us ſearch and try our Ways, and turn to the Lord our God,* Lam. 3. 40. *When he ſlew them they ſought him, and turned them early, and enquired after him.* When we are involved in trouble, our thoughts are buſie in contrivances to extricate and free our ſelves, as *when Ephraim ſaw his ſickneſs, and Judah ſaw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Aſſyrian, and ſent to King Jareb.* Hoſ. 5. 13. We leave no human means untried, but alas! in vain we ſeek to remove the effect of a continuing Cauſe, we do not find the ſource and true original of our afflictions, for we enquire for them abroad, when we ſhould look for them at home; and therefore do not take right meaſures to remove them. The beſt and propereſt remedy is preſcribed by the Holy Ghoſt, *Eccleſ.* 7. 14. *in the day of adverſity conſider.* that is,

is, we muſt conſider, that *our deſtruction is of our ſelves*, and that while our *ſpiritual whoredoms are many and notorious*; we enquire in vain for *peace*, which is not the portion of the *Wicked*: And therefore 'tis no wonder if we are overtaken with a Storm, while like *Jonah*, we are flying fom the *preſence of the Lord*. *Solomon* informs us, that the beſt means of obtaining peace from God, is, *by pleaſing him in our ways*, Prov. 16. 7. for then he will *make all our Enemies to be at peace with us*: We ſhall have peace with God, our Neighbours, and our ſelves; the Wrath of God ſhall be appeaſed, the *fierceneſs of Men reſtrained*, and the clamours of Conſcience ſilenced. So that in our Perſonal or National Diſquietudes, we muſt not fly to the Creature, and ſeek Redreſs from external Succours, but turn our Eyes inward upon our ſelves, and *think upon our ways*, that we may diſcover what *Idol-Luſt* it is to which we pay our homage, that makes God *jealous* and *incenſed*. And when we have obſerved from whence our Afflictions have their natural riſe, we muſt then employ our Induſtry, and look diligently, leſt *any root of bitterneſs ſpring up to trouble us*: And we muſt take the ſame courſe in our Domeſtick tryals.

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If God blows upon our Eſtates, and waſtes them with a ſecret Curſe, and an inviſible Conſumption, ſo that *we ſow much, and bring in little*; *we eat, but have not enough*; *we drink, but are not filled with drink*; *and he that earneth Wages, putteth it into a Bag with holes*; Then we muſt think upon our ways; this is the beſt Preſcription can be given for our Relief: And if Diſappointments blaſt our Hopes, and fruſtrate our Expectations: If Relations prove unnatural, and Friends grow cold; *if our Father and Mother forſake us, and our Kinsfolk ſtand afar off*, we need not fear: But *if we commit our ways unto the Lord*, he will *bring our deſires to paſs*, and will *take us up*, if we *think upon our ways, and turn our feet unto his Teſtimonies.*

A third Seaſon that requires this Duty, is, when we implore ſome ſpecial Bleſſing, and would obtain ſome ſignal Favour at God's hands: the Prophet tells *Iſrael, That their ſins had withholden good things from them*, Jer. 5. 25. And among other fatal Conſequences of their Iniquities, it was one, that *they had ſeparated between their God and them*, Iſa. 59. 2. Nor is it ſtrange that Sins that cry aloud ſhould have as much power as *a Whiſperer*, to *ſeparate chief Friends*. He that *walks in the counſel*

counſel of the ungodly, eſtranges himſelf from God; he goes like the Prodigal *into a far Country*, and hath reaſon to expect that God ſhould purſue him with Vengeance, rather than follow him with Mercies: for he *draws nigh* to none, but ſuch as make humble and devout Approaches to him, unleſs it is for their Deſtruction. He that hath thrown off his filial Obedience, cancels the Bonds of Paternal Love: He that renounces his profeſſed Allegiance, forfeits all Pretences to Protection; in ſuch caſes, we cannot rationally expect that God ſhould cheriſh us as Subjects, or feed us with *the Childrens Bread:* No, our own Hearts will rather prompt us to conclude he ſhould puniſh our Undutifulneſs and Rebellion. If therefore we would be ſituate in the enjoyment of Mercies temporal or ſpiritual; if we would be the Subjects of God's Bounty, and ſo priviledged with Bleſſings of the Right-hand and the left; the moſt compendious way of obtaining both, is to think upon our Ways, ſo as to turn our Feet unto his Statutes. Wou'd we be honour'd with the inhabitation of God's Preſence, we muſt prepare our ſelves for his Reception; and when *our Hearts are clean within us*, he will not *take his holy Spirit from us.* But we

we cannot expect the *King of Glory ſhould come into* thoſe places, where the *Gates*, inſtead of being *lifted up*, are ſhut and made faſt againſt him. Nor will our Sins only withhold ſpiritual good Things from us, but temporal Advantages too: For God declares, that *if his People had hearkned unto him, and* Iſrael *had walked in his ways, he would ſoon have ſubdued their Enemies, and turned his hand upon their Adverſaries.* And if we will ſo much befriend our ſelves as to think upon our ways, and walk in God's, we ſhall have no Enemies, or at leaſt conquer thoſe that are ſo. God will then engage in our Quarrel, to *plead our Cauſe againſt them that ſtrive with us, and fight againſt them that fight againſt us*; he will array the Celeſtial Hoſts in our defence, and lead the *Stars* to battel, *to fight* againſt our Enemies. Nor is this the ſole Advantage we ſhall reap from the faithful diſcharge of our Duty, in thinking on our Ways, for we ſhall quickly find him *open the Windows of Heaven*, and make *his Clouds drop fatneſs on our Dwellings, and pour out ſo large a Bleſſing, that there ſhall not be room enough to receive.*

Such was his liberal dealing with *Solomon*, becauſe he asked the Thing that pleaſed him, 2 *Chron.* 1. 12. He not only granted

granted his requeſt of Wiſdom and Knowledge for himſelf, but added Riches and Wealth, and Honour for an Overplus; and we ſhall not find *his Arm ſhortned*, or his Bounty contracted towards us, if our Deſires are as agreeable to him. In a word, we have been long in expectation of a *bleſſed Peace*, and we have ſometimes thought the *Dove* juſt hovering over us with the welcom Olive-branchin her Bill; but our *hope* hath been *deferred*, even to the *making our Hearts ſick*, and our pregnant Expectations have miſcarried, becauſe we have *put our truſt in Chariots and Horſes, and have not remembred the Name of the Lord our God*, to call him to our *help againſt the mighty*, to pray for the Peace of our *Jeruſalem*; which is not to be obtained only by a bare Addreſs to Heaven, but by duly qualifying our ſelves to become acceptable Petitioners at *the Throne of Grace*, that we may receive a favourable Return of our Supplications. In order to which, we muſt cleanſe our Ways, be Holy, Juſt, and Good, that the Works of our Hands, and *the Meditations of our Hearts*, may gain acceptance *for the Words of our Mouths* before him: for we know the Lord is ſo far from *hearing Sinners* that their *Prayers are an abomination to him*,

Prov. 15. 8. and that which ſhould prevail for Audience, makes him Deaf and Inexorable. And how ſhall the *Wicked* ſue for Peace, to whom God hath declared *there is no peace?* How ſhall they obtain his Pardon for their Sins, when even the Prayers that beg it, help to encreaſe their number?

But if any man be a Worſhiper of God, and doth his Will, him he heareth: And it is only by ſuch means that we can hope to perform our Duty acceptably, to ſollicite Heaven with ſuch ſucceſs, as to procure the Nations Peace, as well as pray for it; and we ſhould think ſeriouſly on our Ways in this particular, becauſe it is a Duty we owe our Country as our Political Parent, and we cannot fail therein, without incurring the cenſure of being of the number of thoſe *fooliſh Sons, who are a heavineſs to their Mother.*

And indeed if we make a diligent ſearch after the true Cauſe why the War is continued abroad, with the little ſucceſs that makes us querulous and unquiet; we may trace it home to our own Doors, and ſhall find it lodged within our ſelves; that our Unthankfulneſs for the great Advances which God hath made towards the eſtabliſhment of our Happineſs, and our repining

repining at his Goodneſs to us, as if we envy'd our own Felicity, and not any neglect, or want of Care or Tenderneſs in thoſe *Powers*, which God, by his extraordinary Protection hath declared to have been *ordained of him*, hath been the only Obſtacle that they have not as happily finiſhed, as they gloriouſly began the *Reſtoration of our Peace.*

A fourth Seaſon for thinking on our Ways, is, When we find others generally inconſiderate, and negligent of theirs.

This is the Tenour of St. *Paul*'s Exhortation to the *Epheſians*, that they ſhould *walk circumſpectly, not as Fools, but as wiſe, redeeming the time*, Epheſ. 5. 16. And the Reaſon he alledges as a cogent Argument, for their obſerving his Direction, is this, *Becauſe the Days are evil*: The Corruption of the Age in which we live, muſt be a Motive to our greater Goodneſs: While others like Fools are prodigal in the expence of their precious irreparable Minutes, it muſt be our Wiſdom to redeem the Time, by making the beſt Improvement of it; and while they turn Libertines in a looſe Latitudinarian courſe of Life, we muſt walk circumſpectly, accurately, and exactly, keeping to the niceſt Rules, and aſpiring to the moſt elevated

heights of Chriſtianity. That Advice to *Timothy*, 2 *Epheſ.* 4. 23. is much of the ſame nature, with this to the *Epheſians*; *Preach the Word, be inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-ſuffering and doctrine:* And the *Apoſtle aſſigns* this Reaſon for his Charge, becauſe the *Time will come, that Men will not endure ſound Doctrine, but will turn away their Ears from the Truth, and be turned to Fables.*

The Evil of the Times ſhould incite good Chriſtians to an extraordinary Care and Diligence, that when they ſee a decay of Piety, they become moſt earneſt to encourage and promote its Reſtoration; that when the Light of Religion is darkned, they may, like the Worſhipers of the Moon, in an Eclipſe, be buſieſt to defend it from the Faſcinations of Impiety that darken it. When the Preaching of *the Goſpel*, that is *the Wiſdom of God unto Salvation*, ſeems *Fooliſhneſs to Men*, and the Meſſengers of thoſe *good Tydings* meet an unkind reception; when there is an Apoſtaſie and falling back from the Truth received: This Negligence and Irreligion ſhould quicken our Care and Devotion. Then is the *time for Rivers of waters to run down our Eyes, when Men do not*

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keep God's Law, then is the Seaſon that our *Zeal ſhould even conſume us,* when they *forget his Words.*

And when, *becauſe of Iniquities thus abounding, the love of many ſhall grow cold,* then ours muſt be moſt fervent, becauſe it is then moſt requiſite, as greateſt Fires are moſt ſeaſonable in Froſty-weather.

And when we *do not follow the multitude to do evil,* nor run with other Men into *exceſs of riot,* we are not to be concerned that they reſent our Singularity, and take it ill to want our Company in that Carriere, or ſpeak Evil of us for refuſing it: For as Jewels caſt the greateſt luſtre in the dark, ſo Religion appears moſt amiable when ſurrounded with Impiety, whoſe deformed Viſage is a Foil to its tranſcendent Beauty. And they who are *blameleſs and harmleſs,* who prove themſelves the *Sons of God, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe generation: ſhine as Lights in the world among them.* The rarity of Things is a great enhanſement of their Value. *Lot* had not been ſo eminent for his Righteouſneſs in any other City, as in *Sodom*; where there were not *Ten more* of the ſame rank and level in Righteouſneſs to be found. What an illuſtrious Figure did *Obadiah* make in the Court of *Ahab,* or the

Saints in Nero's *Houſe?* and what a ſingular Character was it of *Noah*, that he was a *perfect man in his generation*, when the World was ſo corrupt and foul, that the Deluge could ſooner drown than cleanſe it? The Memory of *Job* is ſweeter than all the Aromatic Scents that perfume the Air of his Native *Arabia*, and the World will be for ever as loud in celebrating *Athanaſius*, as he once was in oppoſing it: Nor had it ſo much reaſon to admire its univerſal *Arianiſm*, as this ſingle Oppugner of that *Hereſie*. And when we find St. *Paul* adviſing *Timothy* to *drink no longer Water:* We muſt admire ſuch Temperance among the *Epheſians*, who lived in all the Luxury of *Aſia*, and are ſaid to have baniſhed *Hermodorus* for being Sober and Abſtemious.

It is a memorable Scripture, which may be to us inſtead of all Examples, That *when men called the Proud happy, and ſaid, it was in vain for them to ſerve the Lord*, Mal. 3. 16. in that height of Impurity. *They that feared the Lord ſpake often to another, and a book of remembrance was writ for them.* God was ſo ſtrangely pleaſed with their exemplary deference to Religion, that he made it his own care to have the Names of thoſe pious Men recorded, that he might ſelect them

them for his own, *in the Day when he made up his Jewels.*

Among which the Church of *Pergamus* would not be in leaſt eſteem, ſince God himſelf declares, *He knew her works, and that though ſhe dwelt even where Satan's Seat was,* yet *ſhe held faſt his Name, and had not denied his Faith; even in thoſe Days wherein* Antipas, *his faithful Martyr, was ſlain,* Rev. 2. 13. Here was a noble Inſtance of true Piety, to adhere to God, and aſſert his Power in the midſt of Satan's own Dominions; to hold faſt his Name, though they parted with their Lives, and not to deny his Faith, though they had before them in the Martyr'd *Antipas*, a dreadful Argument of the danger of profeſſing it.

But though there are theſe ſpecial Times that require our thinking on our Ways, there is not any time wherein we can be excuſed from the performance of our Duty in this Employment; for every preſent Minute of our lives, is a proper ſeaſon for it, and indeed requires it, becauſe we have no aſſurance of a future Opportunity. For beſides the uncertainty of our enjoying Life, there is as much of our obtaining Grace, to put it into practice. Wherefore it is the *Apoſtle*'s Annotation on the Text, *Pſalm* 95. 7. *To day if you will hear his*

voice, harden not your hearts; That *God limiteth a certain Day*, and that it does not exceed the preſent Time, *Heb.* 4. 7. And indeed it is more neceſſary every Day than other, becauſe the more our Days encreaſe, the longer time hath been neglected, and the leſs remains to be employed about it.

We cannot launch into the Ocean of Thought and Self-reflection, till we are carried by the motions of the Spirit, and that *Wind blows only where it liſteth*; and if we neglect its favouring Gales, it will ſhift to another Point, and leave us becalmed in our inconſideration, till the Tempeſt of unthought of Death makes Shipwrack of our Souls, and ſinks us into Hell.

Shall we then be, like *Antipater*, not at leiſure, when our Thoughts would preſent us with a Treatiſe of the Way to Happineſs? Such procraſtination may expoſe us to the Fate of *Archias* the *Theban*, who neglected reading the Account that was given into his hand of a Conſpiracy againſt him, till it was put in execution. What an unreaſonable method is it, when God commands us to think upon our Ways to Day, to ſuſpend our Obedience till To-morrow; and though that is a time of our own appointing,

pointing, it happens, that when we live to that To-morrow, our Thoughts, inſtead of reaching it, are by one Days journey farther off. And can we hope that after ſuch reſiſtance againſt the Influence of God's Holy Spirit, he will put it into our power again to ſhew our ſpight, and grieve him with a ſecond refuſal?

It is a *Maxim*, that in War there is no allowance for a ſecond Overſight, becauſe the firſt falſe Step uſually puts things beyond recovery; and he that hath once neglected the Opportunity of thinking on his Ways, may never have it in his power to repeat the Fault. The ſenſe of this made our Saviour weep over *Jeruſalem*, to find that *the things belonging to her peace, were hidden from her Eyes*, becauſe ſhe would take no notice of them *in the Day* when they were laid before her.

Now having conſidered the Seaſon for performing this Duty, let us enquire into the Motives and Inducements that oblige us to it.

And one Reaſon why we ſhould think upon our Ways, is, becauſe God is a ſtrict Obſerver of them. *He looks from Heaven, he beholdeth all the Sons of Men, he faſhioneth their Hearts alike, and conſidereth all their work*, Pſalm 33.13.15. And it is not ſtrange

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that he *who fills Heaven and Earth*, and is preſent in all places, ſhould have a knowledge of all things, ſince he ſearches and tryes them out: Not that God can be thought to enquire or ſearch after any thing, as being unknown to him, but that he knows all things as perfectly and exactly as 'tis poſſible to do by the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny: there is nothing ſo minute in us, no Action ſo mean and indifferent, ſuch as the motion of our Bodies, *our down-ſitting and up-riſing*, but God takes notice of it; there is not a *word in our Tongues, but he knows it altogether*; not a ſyllable we utter, but he underſtands it; nay the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, are ſo far from being a ſecret to him, that he is better acquainted with them, than we are our ſelves; *he underſtands them afar off*, even before we have conceived them: and there is a powerful Reaſon for it, ſince *he hath faſhioned us behind and before, he hath poſſeſſed our reins, and our ſubſtance was not hid from him when we were made in ſecret; for his Eyes ſaw it, yet being unperfect in the Embryo.* And it is no wonder that he ſhould be acquainted with the Work of his own Hands, that he ſhould know us better than we do our ſelves, ſince we are a Wonder to our ſelves, the Structure of

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our Bodies, the uſe and ſervice of every particular Veſſel, with the Artifice and Powers of Senſe, are things beyond our Capacity to explain or underſtand; much more, if we conſider our nobler part the Soul, by what ſecret and myſterious tyes it is united to the Body, by what power it actuates and enlivens our mortal Clay; *ſuch knowledge is too wonderful for us, we cannot attain unto it.* But with God it is no more than for a VVorkman to underſtand what he hath wrought when his VVork is finiſhed. 'Tis in vain therefore to think of concealing our ſelves from our Creator, in whoſe ſight and preſence we continually remain; we cannot hide our ſelves in ſecret places where he ſhall not ſee us; nor is there any refuge, where we may ſhun *his Spirit*, or avoid *his Preſence: If we aſcend to Heaven, he is there*; *if we make our bed in Hell, he is there alſo.* Not that he follows us to either, but is already there before us. And if neither of theſe can ſhelter us, much leſs can *the utmoſt parts of the Earth, or the depth of the Sea conceal us:* Neither *can the Darkneſs cover us, for that and the Light to him are both alike:* So that he ſees all things where he is, and he is in all places, in ſeveral reſpects. As firſt, by his Eſſence, the extent whereof is no more

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to be meaſured by our notion of place, than the duration of it, which is eternal, by our account of Time. It was a right Notion which *Virgil* had of God's eſſential Preſence, and good Divinity, though miſapplied to *Jupiter*; that all things were full of him, that his Nature was not to be circumſcribed by our narrow Apprehenſion, and that he might with as much reaſon be totally excluded from all the Univerſe, as from the leaſt part or angle of it. Nor is he preſent only as an idle Spectator among his Creatures, or employed in doing them any injury; his Goodneſs is as largely extended as his Preſence, and more communicative of it ſelf. Which will appear, if we conſider, Secondly, that he is every where by his Operation and Influence; that *in him we live, and move, and have our being*. And thirdly, That he is every where by his Providence; that care which he continually manifeſts for the Welfare and Preſervation of his Creatures, in *filling them with plenteouſneſs*, which makes *the Eyes of all things wait upon him.*

But how little ſoever we may think our ſelves concern'd in theſe reſpects of God's Omnipreſence, there is another which we muſt conſider; and that is, his being eve-

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ry where, and always preſent with us as a Witneſs of our Actions.

He ſees our Ways, and counts all our Steps; if we have *walked in vanity*, or *our Feet have haſted to deceit*; if our *ſteps have turned out of the way, and our hearts rambled after our eyes*; *he weighs us in an even balance*; and there is *no darkneſs nor ſhadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themſelves*, or their wicked deeds *from him*: For he is concerned to have his Laws obeyed, and to do an impartial Juſtice, by rewarding all the Obſervers, and puniſhing all the Tranſgreſſors of them; and therefore is preſent with every one, and ſtrictly notes his Actions, whether good or bad, that he may know his Integrity, and not fail to give him a ſuitable Recompence. Now the Judgment that is made of any Action, depends chiefly upon the Actor's deſign and intention in it; the ſincerity or inſincerity of which, is not eaſily diſcernable by Man; ſince by ſubtle Reſerves, we keep our little World *incognito*, and free from the Diſcoveries of Men; and therefore it is requiſite that, as *we have nothing, but what we have received from God*, ſo we ſhould have nothing, but what ſhould be liable to his Obſervation; that we may be puniſhed and rewarded by him, not according

to the appearance, but the reality of our Deſerts, which can never be truly underſtood by Men, or recompenſed by humane Laws, but can as little eſcape his ſight and animadverſion, to whom all Hearts are open, and from whom no ſecrets are hid. And ſince no place of retirement, can conceal us, no cunning diſguiſe us from his knowledge: and ſince he is a Judge to puniſh, as well as a Witneſs to remark our Ways; how ought this Conſideration to put a reſtraint upon us from entertaining *wicked thoughts* which *are an abomination to him*; from uttering *idle words*; for every one of which we ſhall *give an account in the* Day of Judgment; and from working *Iniquity*, which will be *our ruine*, in ſo auguſt and terrible a Preſence?

How ſhall we dare to attempt or deſign any thing that is ill, if we will give our ſelves leave to think, that how private ſoever we are, how cloſely ſoever ſecured from the Eyes of Men, yet an avenging God ſtands by and ſees us; a God who *will bring every work to judgment, with every ſecret thing?* He muſt be a bold Thief who would venture to ſteal before a Judge; and there are no Men ſo profligate and rude, into whom the Preſence of an earthly Prince would not ſtrike an awe, and de-

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ter them from the violation of his Precepts to his Face. Nay, the company of ſome grave ſerious Perſon, to whom an unwilling deference is paid, ſhall reſtrain the lewdeſt and profaneſt Wretches, and confine them within the bounds of Modeſty and good Manners: And ſhall we have a greater Dread and Reverence for a temporal and momentany Authority, and reſpect frail man meerly on the account of his God-like Power and Qualities, more than him who is the Author of that Power, and the Original of thoſe Perfections? If we are afraid to have our Fellow-creatures conſcious of our Crimes, why do not we ſtand more in awe of the moſt effectual Witneſs, God himſelf? Is it becauſe we think he will keep our Counſel, and never publiſh or divulge our Secrets? Let not that unhappy Miſtake abuſe us, it would be well for us indeed, if the reaſon of God's continual Preſence with us, were only to be informed of our Doings, and to ſatisfie his Curioſity; and that he would be content with making Remarks upon our Actions, without giving us any farther trouble; but we may be ſure the end of his Preſence with us, and Knowledge of us, is, that he may do us juſtice, which he doth not always defer till the

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Great Day of *General Accounts*, when *the ſecret of all hearts ſhall be diſcloſed:* For we ſee often, the cloſeſt Sinners, who have committed their Wickedneſs with the greateſt ſecrecy imaginable, and thought themſelves ſecure, becauſe no mortal Eye cou'd detect or excuſe them; have been diſcovered purely by Providence: And the moſt exquiſite Hypocrites have in time had their Vizards taken off, by the hand of an over-ruling Power; whoſe Wiſe Diſpoſal is never more conſpicuous, than in giving ſuch Diſſemblers and Triflers their due reward. But if none of theſe extraordinary events ſhould happen, yet is not the Vengeance of that *Day in which he will judge the world with righteouſneſs*, to be at all rever'd and dreaded? Is not that *ſhame and confuſion of face*, which will then come on all, eſpecially ſecret Sinners; over and above the ſentence of Eternal Puniſhment, to be regarded in the leaſt, when our ſecret Sins ſhall be laid as open in the preſence of Angels, Men, and Devils, as they were to God before? When *whatſoever hath been done in ſecret ſhall be proclaimed upon the houſe-top*; and we ſhall find too late, that all our diſſimulation ſerved only to expoſe us the more at laſt.

If then we would gain Eſteem and Credit in the World; if we would eſcape Contempt and Ignominy both here and before the Great Tribunal, if we would prove our ſelves true and faithful Servants of our Maſter; the only way is to have this Thought always in our Minds, that whether we are allured and tempted to any Evil by privacy and opportunity; or whether we are moved to any Good, whether publick or private; we are in God's ſight, *who ſees in ſecret, and will reward us openly.* It is certain we do not neglect to think upon our Ways, on this account, for want of being reminded of it; for God complains of our little regard to his taking notice of our Ways, *that we conſider not in our Hearts, that he conſiders all our Wickedneſs, that they are before his Face,* Hoſ. 7. 2. He cannot but admire that we ſhould forget what he remembers, eſpecially when our remembring our Sins, is the moſt effectual means to make him think on them no more; or that we ſhould never look back to that which is ſtill before his Face, as if that which will expoſe us to his Fury, were not worth our concern or regard. If then our Ways are conſidered by him, who raiſed us out of the Duſt, and can with a Frown reduce us to our primitive No-

thing: Nay, if he, who *cannot only kill the Body, but cast both Body and Soul into Hell-fire eternally; ſets our Miſdeeds before him, and our ſecret Sins in the light of his Countenance:* Sure this is reaſon enough to prevail with us to ſtay awhile and peruſe ſome few Lines in the Volume of our ſelves, to employ our Thoughts a little in reflecting on our Ways, leſt by the neglect of that, we come to ſuffer for them.

A Second Reaſon for *our thinking on our Ways*, is, becauſe *Satan* is a curious Inquiſitor into them: For by his Anſwer to the Queſtion which God propounded, *Haſt thou conſidered my Servant Job?* It is very eaſie to collect, that *Job* was no ſtranger to his Obſervation: He cou'd familiarly recount what Diſburſements the Bounty of Heaven had made in favour of him, and repeat the whole Catalogue of the Mercies he had received; how he was incircled in the Arms of Providence, and ſeated in a Confluence of Enjoyments. For *compaſſing the Earth, and going to and fro in it*, is his perpetual buſineſs, and the deſign of all his Travel is to make Diſcoveries of *what he may devour.* Now we know he is our profeſſed Adverſary, there is an irreconcilable *Enmity between the Seed of the Woman and the Serpent*, which puts him upon

upon unwearied undertakings to deſtroy us: For as he delights in Sin, becauſe it is repugnant to God's Holineſs, and abominable in his ſight; ſo he hates us on God's account, becauſe we bear his Image and reſemblance, which is not ſo wholly defaced in Man as in himſelf. 'Tis his deſign therefore to deſtroy the leaſt Repreſentation of that Image, where he finds it; and this he endeavours, firſt as a Tempter, to entice us to commit Wickedneſs, and then as an Informer to betray us; for it is his whole buſineſs to render us as odious to God, as he hath made himſelf. We have an Inſtance of this in *Job*; for though God was pleaſed to declare the Satisfaction he had concerning the *Uprightneſs* and *Perfection* of that holy Man, yet the Devil's Malice and Impudence was ſo great, that he pretended to know more of him, than God himſelf; and he undertook to diſcover an Evil in him, which was undeſerved by his All-ſeeing Eye. So that to execute and indulge his Malice in our Ruine, he is never idle, but ſtill enquiring into our ways, to find how he may endanger us: And he meets no difficulty in the undertaking, the Temperament, Compoſure, and Natural Diſpoſition of our Bodies, lye more open to his View, than to

the Knowledge of the moſt exquiſite Phyſician; he can interpret the ſilent language of a Bluſh, and ſhrewdly gueſs at the true Original of a Sigh; and the Source of our Tears, though to others, as undiſcoverable as the Head of *Nile*, is eaſily found out by him. By the diſturbances of our Sleep, and thoſe various Agitations whereby we do almoſt render our Dreams intelligible, he is able to make very near Conjectures, by what Methods he may beſt enſnare us, and lays thoſe Baits before us, which he finds moſt agreeable to our Appetites. He is a critical Overſeer of our Performances, and either endeavours to vitiate and corrupt, whatever he ſees good, or accuſes us to our ſelves and Heaven, for whatever he finds amiſs. If he beholds Fervency and Devotion in our Prayers, he fills us with wandring Thoughts to cool and interrupt it; if he perceives in us a religious Obſervance of God's Laws, and a conſciencious Diligence in the performance of our Chriſtian Duty, he perſwades us to believe that it is needleſs, as he once did our firſt Parents; and that though we remit of the exactneſs of our Obedience, *we ſhall not ſurely die*; and then if he prevails upon upon us to eat any forbidden Fruit, to tranſgreſs the Commandments of our God,

God, he preſently gives us the ſhameful Proſpect of our Nakedneſs, poſſeſſes us with Dread and Trembling, and makes us *hide our ſelves from the Preſence of the Almighty.* Or if for awhile he lets us pleaſe our ſelves in a belief, that *we are become as Gods*, when indeed we are neareſt to the ſtate of Devils; yet, he will at ſome time ſet our Sins before us, perhaps when we are weary of his bondage, and begin to look towards Heaven, to make us deſpair of reception there; or, if not when we would part with him, yet when we are taking a farewel of the World; Then he, who before *ſewed Pillows to our Elbows*, will ſtuff our Death-beds full of Thorns, and fill our Souls with the torturing recollection of our Wickedneſs, making us to *remember our own evil ways, and our doings that were not good*; ſo that *we ſhall loath our ſelves* in our own ſight, *for our Iniquities, and for our Abominations.* Our abuſe of God's Mercies, our neglect of holy Duties, our deafneſs to the Overtures of Grace, our diſregard of Threatnings, our incorrigibleneſs under Judgments, our profuſe expence of Time, our breach of Vows and Reſolutions of Amendment, and our Wickedneſs and Rebellion of every kind, will be the frightful Topicks to furniſh

niſh him with Arguments to make us conclude againſt our ſelves, that we are loſt for ever, and that our Life and Hope is periſhed from the Lord.

And if he ſhall not thus be able to affright and drive us into Deſpair, or rob us of our Spiritual Conſolations; yet the ſenſe and ſatisfaction of them will be much leſſened and allayed. Nor can we doubt the extent of this our Adverſary's Knowledge, to be thus vaſt, or his employing it to this pernicious end; if we conſider his Nature, that he is a Spirit in reſpect of his Eſſence, and by the Sublimity of that, arrives at his extraordinary Knowledge, beſides the acquired Experience of long Practice. So that by his Power we find that he is great, and of the Rank of the firſt Creatures: But he is an evil Spirit too, fallen from the higheſt Degree of Eminency, to the loweſt Abyſs of Miſery, and fraught with an inveterate Malice againſt the Glory of his Creator, which he can vent no otherwiſe, but in the ruine of his moſt endeared Creature Man, that ſo he may affront God in his Repreſentative. And if it ſeems ſtrange to us that the Eye which *runs through the whole Earth*, and ſurveys in an inſtant the largeſt extent of all Things, ſhould require, or allow the help

help of an Informer; we ſhall find it deſigned for our Advantage; that the fear of ſuch an Enemy, might make us the more cautious of our Ways; ſince it is requiſite for our ſafety, to have Enemies to upbraid, as well as Friends to inſtruct us: And if we are wiſe, we ſhall make an Advantage of the Devil's Enmity; and *the roaring of this Lion* ſhould make us learn of *the Beaſts of the Foreſt, to tremble and be afraid to commit any thing*, that will give him opportunity to encreaſe his noiſe againſt us, or get us into his power.

A Third Reaſon why we ſhould think upon our Ways, is, becauſe Wicked-men take notice of them.

The *Pſalmiſt* tells us, that *the wicked watcheth,* (the Latin Tranſlation is, *conſidereth*) *the righteous*, Pſalm 37. 32. for Wicked-men have a near reſemblance of *their Father the Devil*; and, as if they were fond of proving themſelves his Sons, are exact Imitators of his Works: For as *the Devil goeth about as a roaring Lion, ſeeking whom he may devour*; ſo *the wicked lieth in wait ſecretly as a Lion in his Den, to catch the poor. They watch for our Souls*, not as our Spiritual Teachers are ſaid to do, but as God threatens *Iſrael* he will do, *for evil, and not for good*, Jer. 44. 27. with the ſame

diligence, and no leſs ill deſign, that made the Prophet complain, *his familiars watched for his halting*, Jer. 20. 10. for the Wicked are delighted at the Failings of the Juſt, and pleaſed to find occaſion of *ſharpening their Reproaches againſt them.* Which made *David* pray, to *have his Eyes enlightned, that he might not ſleep the ſleep of death, leſt his Enemies ſhould ſay, they had prevailed againſt him, and thoſe that troubled him ſhould rejoyce when he was moved*, Pſalm 13. 3, 4. Nay, ſuch is their Malice, that where they have no real Objection, they will invent Pretences, and make a way to blaſt us where they do not find one, according to their dealing with the Prophet, who cry'd, *Report, and we will report it.* They hope that a bold Calumny will gain belief, or if it cannot ruine the Credit of good Men in the World, yet it may at leaſt bring their Innocence into ſuſpicion. Nor is this all, their Hatred hath a farther aim; for the Reproaches that ſeem directed againſt the perſons of the Righteous, are as well deſigned againſt their Profeſſion, and Religion is wounded thro' the ſides of its Adherents.

When the Holy Ghoſt by his miraculous Deſcent on the *Apoſtles*, inſpired them with the *Gift of various Tongues*, to ſpeak

the wonderful things of God: How ready were the *Jews* to impute it to exceſs of *Wine* and *Drunkenneſs?* And even the ſpotleſs irreproachable Life of the Holy Jeſus, that immaculate Lamb of God, could not eſcape the evil Eye of the *Phariſees*, who obſerved and *watched him*, not to take example by him, but to traduce and vilifie him, to find an occaſion of bringing *an Accuſation againſt him*, and miſ-repreſenting him to the World. For the Righteous *are not of the World*, and therefore are hated in it; and the ground of this hatred which makes the Wicked lye in wait for them, is, *becauſe they are not for their turn, but directly contrary to their doings, they upbraid them with their offending of the law, and object to their infamy, the Tranſgreſſions of their Education*, Wiſd. 2. 13. As the Piety of a good Man's life, has no communication with the Wickedneſs of the Ungodly's Ways; ſo it is a ſilent Reproof of their Irregularities and ill Conduct, and they hate the Light of thoſe holy Performances which diſcovers the Impurity of theirs: Wherefore they watch his Goings, that if he ſlips, they may reproach him with it, in hope that the aggravating his errors, will help to extenuate their own.

And while as the *Pſalmiſt* ſpeaks, *They*

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ſet their mouth againſt the Heavens, Pſalm 73. 9. We cannot wonder *their Tongue ſhould walk through the Earth*, to defame the Candidates of Heaven. But the leſs occaſion they have for their Malice, the leſs trouble it will give us; and while their Endeavours are employed to blacken and expoſe us, let ours be as buſie to defeat and diſappoint them. Thus we ſhall tire their Spight, *put their Ignorance to ſilence*, and make them at laſt *aſhamed, having no evil thing to ſay againſt us.* But if we find that we have given occaſion for their Accuſations, we have the greater reaſon to think upon our Ways, and look into our ſelves, that we may remove the Cauſe of an Effect ſo intolerable to us. And thus our Enemies may be-friend us; nay Malice it ſelf be as advantageous as the greateſt Kindneſs, and by upbraiding us with our Errours, prevail with us to correct them ſooner than perhaps we would at the inſtance of our moſt endear'd Aſſociates. As *Saul*'s deſign to ruine *David*, by putting him upon dangerous Enterprizes, made him more beloved in *Iſrael*, and *his Name precious through the Kingdom*: So we ſhall be exalted and illuſtrated in the Piety and Eminency of our Converſation, by the Endeavours of Wicked-men to leſſen and eclipſe

cliplſe us; their nicer Obſervation will diſcover to us thoſe Blemiſhes in our ſelves, which have at any time eſcaped our own Inſpection; and while they *wait for us to deſtroy us*, they will ſend us to *conſider God's Teſtimonies.*

A Fourth Reaſon for our thinking upon our Ways, is, becauſe there will come a time when we ſhall heartily repent the neglect of it, and wiſh our Thoughts had been ſo employed. *Theſe things thou did'ſt* (ſaith God to the Wicked) *Pſalm* 50.21. *and I kept ſilence, but I will reprove thee, and ſet thy ſins in order before thee.* God's ſilence will not laſt for ever, there will be a time for him to ſpeak and to reprove, when *he ſhall ſmite the Earth with the Rod of his Mouth, and with the Breath of his Lips ſhall ſlay the Wicked*: for though he be a *righteous Judge, ſtrong and patient*, a God that *will not always be chiding*; yet to be *provoked every day*, to be continually made to *ſerve with our ſins, and wearied with our iniquities*, will turn his Patience into Wrath and Indignation; then he ſhall *ariſe as one out of ſleep, and as a Giant refreſhed with Wine*: then he ſhall bring Diſtreſs and Anguiſh upon us, and we ſhall *eat the fruit of our own ways*, and be *filled with our own devices.* Will it not be a terrifying Scene, when

when God opens the black Catalogue of our Sins before our Eyes, and calls it over in our hearing; when he taxes us with Sins of Omiſſion and of Commiſſion, with ſecret and with open Perpetrations; with Sins of Ignorance and Inadvertency, and with wilful and deliberate Tranſgreſſions? Then we ſhall be ſeverely puniſhed for the evil of our Ways, becauſe we would not think upon them time enough to amend them.

Now the neglect of employing our thoughts in the conſideration of our Ways, will be inſupportable to us upon ſeveral accounts.

Firſt, When we think upon the happy Condition of thoſe who faithfully performed this Duty, and had their *Sins ever before them*, to reform them. Our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that *there ſhall be weeping and wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth among them*, when *they ſhall ſee* Abraham *and* Iſaac, *and* Jacob, *and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and be themſelves thruſt out*, St. *Luke* 13. 28. What an aggravation of our Miſery will it be to ſee ſome who have been our Fellow-Citizens on Earth, made Denizons of the *New Jeruſalem*, while we are excluded the Society? How ſhall we afflict our ſelves, when we ſee ſome of our

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own Family received into the *Houſhold of God*, while we are not allowed to *tarry in his ſight*? what Heat will it add to the unquenchable Flames wherein we burn, to look on ſome who have been our Familiars and Intimates, invited into endleſs Joys, while a ſad ſeparation, as diſtant and remote as Hell from Heaven, is made between us, and we ſhall be ſentenced to *depart into everlaſting Fire*? ſhall not the *Sorrows of our Hearts be enlarged*, as the Rich-man's were in Hell, to ſee *Lazarus comforted, while he was tormented*; and happy *in Abraham's Boſom*, while he was *miſerable in the Flames*? Then we ſhall condemn and bewail our Folly and Negligence, that we did not think upon our Ways, *nor ſee them in the valley of Tears*, but went on *in the way of Sinners*, which though it was *made plain with Stones, had the Pit of Hell at the end thereof.*

When we hear the Hymns and Allelujahs, the Praiſes and Acclamations of Angels and Saints, and *Spirits of juſt Men made perfect*, with which Heaven reſounds, we ſhall *lament and howl*, as loud as they rejoyce, and add Horrour to the Regions of Darkneſs, by our Yellings. When we conſider what a Glorious Liberty, what a Harmonious Quiet, what a Full Felicity

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the Souls of the Bleſt enjoy; and that it was once within our Option, and might have been our Portion too; when we ſee *what great Things the Lord hath done for them who thought upon their ways*; who *ſet them up Way-marks, and ſet their Hearts toward the high-way to Heaven*: And with what Rigours he purſues thoſe who did not hearken to that voyce which cry'd to them, *ſtand in awe, and ſin not, commune with your own hearts: Ask for the old way, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you ſhall find reſt for your Souls*: We ſhall then be exceeding ſorry that we did not walk therein, that we did not hearken to our God.

Secondly, When we call to remembrance for what it was that we forfeited our Intereſt in Heaven, we ſhall repent that we did not think upon our imprudent Courſes, to *turn our feet from every evil way*. When we perceive with what infinite Treaſures we have parted, how we have ſold *an Inheritance unſpeakably great*, and yet *have nothing in our hands to ſhew*. Will not our Affliction be ſuited to our Loſs? The happy State of our firſt Parents is a Topick that affords us Arguments to condemn their Folly in forfeiting their Intereſts; that being great in the Command

Command of *Eden*, and greater in their Innocence; ſo that they were as free from the Inclination to, as the Commiſſion of an Ill, their Minds like their Dwelling, did abound with variety of Delight, and wanted nothing to render their Joys equal to thoſe of *Paradiſe*; yet they would, for the inconſiderable ſatisfaction of Taſting the Fruit of one forbidden Tree, not only diveſt themſelves of the Priviledge they enjoyed, of uſing whatever elſe was in the Garden, but throw themſelves out of that happy Seat, and the Favour of their God. And yet we daily ſplit upon the ſame Rock, for want of thinking on our Ways.

But when, like them, *we ſee our Nakedneſs*, when we find the ſpecious appearances of Sin prove a loathſom Deformity to affright us; when we ſee our Riches have found *their Wings*, our Pleaſures diſappear, our Honours drop away; when we find that we have made *Eſau*'s Bargain, and *ſold our Birth-right for a morſel of Meat*, and ſhall, like him, *find no place for Repentance, though we ſeek it carefully with Tears*: Then we ſhall nauſeate and abhor the Vanities that ſeduced and alienated our Affections from *the Joys above*, and made us miſpend our time, and wander

out

out of our way, in purſuing Shadows, when we ſhould have been employed in ſearching for the Subſtance; When we conſider that we have parted with *the Pearl of price* for Trifles, and with a Kingdom, and that of Glory too, for a Dungeon, ſhall we not take up the Prophet's Wiſh, *That our Heads were Waters, and our Eyes ſo well ſupplied with Tears, that we might weep Day and Night for* the Ruine of our Souls. But alas! we need not wiſh what will be a main part of our puniſhment.

When we are condemn'd to the Regions of Miſery and Horrour, what ſhowry Eyes, and mournful Looks ſhall we caſt back upon the *amiable Dwellings of the Lord of Hoſts*; the glorious Manſions of the Righteous, which we never would believe were worth our ſeeking, till they were paſt our finding, and then perceived too late, they were as much above our Admiration, as our Reach? Had we diveſted our ſelves of that Light with which the Saints are clothed, for Nakedneſs or a ſuit of *Fig-leaves* only, even that had been a matchleſs Folly, an unparallel'd Madneſs; but to be clothed with Shame and Confuſion, and veſted with ſcorching Flames beſides: to part with all the Joys

of

of Heaven for Stripes; which, like *Joſeph*'s Irons, *will enter into our Souls*, and whoſe Smart will continue to Eternity: To aſſign a Name to this, or to expreſs it fully, is above the reach of Invention, and beyond the power of Eloquence.

But thirdly, When to the Thoughts of our loſt Happineſs, we ſhall add the diſmal conſideration, that it can never be recovered; when we ſee no proſpect of a Reſtoration, no offer of any terms for Heaven; but find our ſelves, nay our very Hopes ſhut out, by the interpoſition of an unpaſſible Gulf; when we feel our Condition ſo extreamly miſerable, that 'tis impoſſible to encreaſe our Sufferings, and yet as impoſſible to leſſen them: This will make us *roar for the very diſquiet of our Souls*. The ſenſe of this will corrode our Vitals, and prove the *never-dying Worm* to gnaw and torture us eternally. Could we, amidſt theſe Terrors, find any ground to *hope in the day of evil*, or foreſee any likelihood of an end to theſe our Labours, though never ſo remote; this would alleviate the pain and miſery of them: Or were we condemned to any *Flames* but thoſe that are *unquenchable*, confin'd to any Priſon but a *Hell*, *whence there is no redemption*; if our Acceſs to Heaven was

prohibited by any other Intrenchments than that of Impoſſibility; or could we be freed from the worſt of all the Fiends that torture us, Deſpair: This would prove a Relaxation of our Sufferings, and give us eaſe amidſt our Torments; would make us endure Hell-fire, with *Scevola*'s Reſolution, and bear its Violence with an Apathy above the Precepts of the *Stoicks*. But Damnation hath no ſuch kind allay to mitigate its Rigour, and render it leſs formidable; there is no ſuch comfortable glimpſe of Light ariſes in the Regions of eternal Darkneſs. When we are once conſigned to this wretched ſtate, there will be no deliverance from it; though we *die daily in it*, we ſhall never die ſo happily, as to come to a period of our Sufferings; and what expectation can we cheriſh of an end of other things, where even Death it ſelf becomes immortal?

And then fourthly, If ſuch infinite Miſery can receive an addition, it will be one, that we ſhall live unpitied in it. Heaven that onely can relieve us, will be deaf to all our Cries, and that *Compaſſion* that doth *never fail*, will not however extend it ſelf to us. There will be no *ſounding of God's Bowels, or of his Mercies towards us: And to which of the Saints ſhall we turn?* Abraham

will

will be ignorant of us, and Iſrael *will not acknowledge us.* Not all the rich Glutton's Oratory could move the Father of the Faithful to a Senſe or Commiſeration of his Torments, all his Entreaties could not prevail for *a drop of water to cool his Tongue*, and allay the intolerable Heat that forced it to complain, and yet render'd it unable; for how could he expect to find Compaſſion, who himſelf had none? Or was it not juſt, that for want of *ſhewing Mercy*, he ſhould have *Judgment without Mercy?* Had he thought upon his Ways in time, he would not have *ſtopped his Ears at the Cry of the Poor*, nor denied his Crums to *Lazarus*, becauſe he would have foreſeen the fatal Conſequence of ſuch an Uncharitableneſs, the Puniſhment it brought upon him, that *he ſhould alſo cry, and not be heard.*

Our Friends, who in this *vale of miſery*, ſympathize in all our Sorrows, who pine when we are ſick, languiſh when we are weak, and weep when we are afflicted; who feel our Sufferings, and reſent our Sorrows as their own, will put off all that Tenderneſs in the other World, as they do Mortality, they will quit their Affection with their Fleſh, in which alone we are related; and retain no Concern, no Pity

for us in that ſtate where we ſhall want it moſt.

Even the fond Mother, by whoſe Indulgence God is ſometimes pleaſed to repreſent his Love to Men, and for whom he ſuppoſes it almoſt impoſſible to *forget her Child*, that *ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion on the Son of her Womb*; She may, nay ſhe will there forget him. Not the *bearing on her Knees*, or the *Suckling at her Breaſt*, will make *her Bowels yearn*, or her Eyes ſhed one kind Tear to quench the Fire that torments her miſerable off-ſpring.

For if our Friends are happier than we, and have their Reſidence in Heaven, there *all Tears are wiped away, and neither ſorrow nor crying ſhall be heard.* It is inconſiſtent with the Felicity of that Place to admit of any diminution, and though *the Converſion of one Sinner*, makes an addition to the *joy*, as well as to the *number of the bleſſed*; the *damnation of ten thouſand* will not leſſen it.

And if our Friends are of that *number*, and condemned to the ſame *deplorable circumſtances* with us; they will be ſo employed in bewailing their own Miſery, that they cannot be at leiſure to conſider ours. Nay, perhaps our ſharing in their Torments, may rather leſſen than encreaſe them,

them; for they will have ill nature enough to be pleaſed at the Tortures we endure, as well as at their having Fellow-ſufferers. At leaſt 'tis ſure the Saints in Heaven ſhall rejoyce at our Deſtruction, when *it cometh as a whirlwind*, and laugh at our Diſtreſs and Anguiſh; and when they ſee us rooted out of the *land of the living*, ſhall mock and ſay, *Lo, theſe are the men that made not God their ſtrength, but ſtrengthned themſelves in wickedneſs*: Theſe are the Men that would not think upon their Ways, to refrain their Feet from every *evil way*, and to *guide them into the way of peace*. Thus ſhall they triumph at the Glorification of Divine Juſtice, tho' in the ruine of their neareſt Relations, and praiſe God for ever, becauſe it is his doing. And can we think upon theſe doleful Conſequences of our Inconſiderateneſs, and not be frighted into a ſpeedy Examination of our Ways? What though when we rake the Dunghil, we find nothing but Naſtineſs and Stench; when we draw the Scene, we diſcover nothing but Guilt and Horrour; is it not better to endure this for awhile by choice, than to be condemned to it for ever, and ſuffer it by compulſion? Is it not more eligible to beſtow a little time in this Employment, with ſome

proſpect of Advantage, than to be forced to it always, with as little hope of mending our Condition, as of reforming the Ways that brought us to it?

This Work is now our Duty, and upon the right performance of it, will become our Advantage too, and prove its own Reward: but the neglect of it will be ſeverely puniſhed, in the ruine that will infallibly attend it; and ſurely the not thinking at all upon our Ways, muſt be very deſtructive, ſince we may be deceived, and make a wrong Eſtimate of them, when they do employ our Thoughts.

Which is a Fifth Motive to induce us to make the Inſpection of our Ways the great Buſineſs and Employment of our Thoughts.

Solomon, who gave his Heart to ſeek and ſearch out by Wiſdom, concerning all things that are done under Heaven, diſcovered in his Survey, a *Way that ſeemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*, Prov. 14. 12. So that we may be in a way of which we may entertain a good Opinion, and ſing a *Requiem* to our Souls, through a confidence of our Security therein; but upon better ſearch, and more ſtrict examination, we ſhall find it dangerous and deſtructive: the *way to*

Hell,

Hell, and the deſcent to the Chambers of Death. Nay, 'tis our Misfortune, that as there are many means to take us from the World, and but one to bring us into it; ſo there are ſeveral Ways to deprive us of Eternal Life, and but one that can conduct us to it: And if we conſult the *Proverbs*, we ſhall find that *every way of a man is right in his own Eyes*, Prov. 21.2. The Adulterer thinks his *ſtollen waters ſweet, and his bread eaten in ſecret pleaſant, and knows not that the dead are there, and that the gueſts* of that Vice *are in the depths of Hell.* The Libertine *rejoyces in his youth, and walks in the ways of his heart, and in the ſight of his eyes*, and conſiders not, *that for all theſe things God will bring him into judgment. The rich man's wealth is his ſtrong City, and as an high Wall in his own conceit, and he is wiſe in his own eyes*, in preparing thus for his ſecurity: But alas, *his riches will not profit him in the day of wrath, and he that truſts in them ſhall fall.* And theſe are not the onely Perſons under a miſtake; there is *a juſt man too that periſheth in his righteouſneſs.* But though Men may be deceived, who too often look no further than the out-ſide and appearances of things, God who pondereth the Heart, diſcerns their Errour: He knows we are partial

Judges of our own Tranſactions, and may be bribed and corrupted to paſs a favourable Sentence in an ill Cauſe wherein our ſelves are intereſted: He ſees thoſe Failings and Corruptions in us, which we over-look, and does not ſo well approve, is not ſo fond of us, as we conceit. So that, as nothing is more common and familiar than this Couſenage of our ſelves, ſo nothing is more dangerous; eſpecially when the miſtake lies in the Opinion of our Ways.

What a diſmal thing is it for us to be journeying to Ruine and eternal Miſery, and yet go chearfully on, in a belief that we are ſtill at a greater diſtance from it; to conclude our ſelves juſt at the Gate of Heaven, and find at laſt that we are upon the Confines of Hell. We have in holy Writ, many deplorable Inſtances of Men pleaſing themſelves in their conceited Safety, when their Danger was imminent; When *marrying and giving in marriage*, was the Buſineſs of the World *in the days of Noah*; as if by the encreaſe of their Poſterity, they deſigned it ſhould remain for ever, to inherit their Poſſeſſions to Eternity; who expected that they ſhould be ſwept away by a ſudden Deluge, and *their places know them no more?*

When

When *the Sun was riſen upon the Earth* in the day of *Sodom*'s Overthrow, who could have believed that he was then to take his Farewel of that City, that thoſe were the laſt Smiles his Beams ſhould caſt upon it, and that its Glory ſhould decline before his ſetting? There was nothing diſcernable in the Face of the Sky, from whence they could preſage the approaching Storm. Which made *Lot*'s Sons-in-law, as much trifle with the Predictions of their Father, as they thought he did with their belief; they could not fear that a Day introduced with ſuch a glorious Prologue, and whoſe firſt Scene opened ſo delightfully, ſhould have ſuch a Tragical Cataſtrophe. But while they and their Fellow-Citizens, were pleaſing themſelves, as *David* did in his *Proſperity*, with the fancy of an unalterable Eſtabliſhment, and thinking on nothing *but Peace and Safety*, behold a ſudden Deſtruction came upon them, when it was not in their power to eſcape, and too late they bewailed the Puniſhment, who made a mock at the Sin that had occaſioned it. Thus unhappily do Men, like the effeminate *Agag*, flatter themſelves with an Opinion, that *the bitterneſs of Death is paſt*, when it is juſt at hand; and with the rich Fool in the Goſpel,

ſpel, promiſe themſelves *many Days*, when they have not a Night to live. Theſe are Tragical Relations, but we may find a more Melancholy Account of Perſons deceived in a Concern more conſiderable than this tranſitory Life; even in the important matter of Salvation and Life eternal. Of this number were the fooliſh Virgins, St. *Matth.* 25. 11. they expected Entrance into Heaven, and doubtleſs had fairer Pleas for it, than many of us can make.

They had Lamps, which argued ſome Light and Heat in their Converſation; they accompanied the Wiſe with the ſame Deſign of meeting Chriſt, which implied their being of the Communion of Saints on Earth; and therefore, came very confident of Admiſſion into that in Heaven, and cry'd, *Lord, open to us*, as if they were injured to be kept out at all, and that the Gate muſt immediately fly open on the notice of their Arrival. But they found themſelves miſtaken, the Bridegroom diſowned them, and declared, *He knew them not.* Thus were they diſappointed of their Hope in reſpect of ther Final Eſtate and Station, and that through a confident Opinion of their Safety. For what *Seneca* ſays of Wiſdom, is as true of Happineſs,

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it would be eaſily attainable, if Men did not hinder their enquiry after it, by thinking it their own already; for they who are thus *whole* in their own Opinions, vvill never be perſwaded that *they have need of a Phyſician*, nor conſult his Skill, till they are paſt its help. Our bleſſed Lord tells us of many vvho in the laſt Day, vvill come to him for Entrance into his Kingdom, and alledge *that they have propheſied in his Name, and in his Name caſt out Devils, and in his Name done many wonderful works:* But all the return they ſhall receive, vvill be this profeſſion, *I never knew you, depart from me ye workers of iniquity.* With vvhat Confuſion can vve think theſe Men will be ſeized, to find themſelves ſo deceived in reſpect of their eternal Welfare; That neither the Excellency of their *Preaching to others* ſhall ſecure themſelves from being *caſt away*: Nor their Prophetick foreſight of Events, prevent their impending Ruine; nor their working Miracles, help to effect their own Salvation; nor their caſting out Devils, tend to diſpoſſeſs *Satan* of his Intereſt in their Souls? That no regard ſhall be had to their exquiſite Parts, their enlightned Apprehenſions, profound Judgments, and Eminency in the World: But that notwith-

notwithſtanding theſe Pretenſions, and their being no Strangers to the *Name of Chriſt*; when they come to plead their Acquaintance, and to knock at Heaven, they ſhall be ſent away aſhamed, and not prevail to have the Claim they judged ſo plauſible, admitted? What then may we think will become of us, who have no ſuch Arguments in our behalf, if Men of theſe Qualifications can miſcarry? Should not we think all the Time and Conſideration we are Maſters of, too little to employ in thinking on our Ways; and that our moſt deliberate Thoughts would be too curſory and tranſient, as well as all our Days too ſhort and fugitive, for the performance of a Duty that will everlaſtingly concern us? Is it not then time that we ſhould with all Seriouſneſs apply our ſelves to reduce theſe Rules to practice, to think judiciouſly upon our Ways; and while we are employed in *working out our Salvation*, by this means, to do it with *fear and trembling*, leſt we ſhould take wrong meaſures in it; and by miſtaking the means, fail of obtaining the end: and while we think *our ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all our paths are peace*, go on unapprehenſive of the Danger and Deſtruction to which they tend?

And

And now, having gone over the Motives obliging us to the Performance of this Duty; that no Age may think it ſelf excuſed from this Employment, in which the young and the old are equally concerned; let the following *Section* be a Remembrancer to both.

The *Pſalmiſt* implies a neceſſity for *a young man to cleanſe his way*, in preſcribing, *his taking heed thereto*, as the means and beſt Cathartick, *Pſalm* 119. 9.

And indeed this is a Work very ſuitable to their Age, becauſe it ought to be begun betimes. As therefore they are *to remember their Creator*, ſo they muſt think on the Correſpondency of their Ways to his Commands, *in the days of their youth*, when the Reflection will be moſt eaſily made, as having but a little time to look back upon, a ſhort Hiſtory to recollect; and when it will be moſt advantageous too, in an early precaution, directed to prevent their wandring in the Journey which they have before them. But perhaps this may not reliſh with thoſe whoſe active Blood finds a free Circulation in their Veins, whoſe quick and lively Spirits labour under no Oppreſſion, and therefore think themſelvas in an Age fitter for Action, than Deliberation; and that

'tis

'tis a properer Seaſon to *crown their Heads with Roſe-buds*, than to trouble them with *Cares*, and believe they have Time enough in ſtore to allow many Days to Mirth and Youthful luſts, and yet leave a ſufficient Space for being Serious and Conſiderate. Theſe think they are early at their Duty, if they ſettle their Thoughts when their Blood begins to ſtagnate, and become grave and ſerious, when they grow dull and heavy, and that the fitteſt Seaſon for *thinking on their Ways*, will be when Age hath rendred them unfit for any but ſuch Melancholy Entertainment. But alas, what Security can they give themſelves of arriving at that Time? What Office is there to Aſſure their Lives to ſuch a Period? Is Youth any more proof againſt Mortality than Age? Nay, is it not rather more ſubject to it? We know Flowers are with greater eaſe nipt in the Bud, and broken from their tender Stalks; than when they are full blown, and an addition to their Age, hath withal encreaſed their ſtrength. And every Charnel-houſe will preſent us with as many Skulls, that ſtill retain their Hair and Teeth, as that had loſt thoſe Ornaments, before they ſaw Corruption. For there are thoſe who *die in their full ſtrength*, or

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as 'tis in the *Hebrew*, in the ſtrength of their perfection; *with their Breaſts full of Milk, and their Bones moiſtned with Marrow*, as well as thoſe who go ſapleſs to the Grave, and are Skeletons before they die. The Life of Man hangs upon very ſlender Filaments, and a thouſand Accidents, which no Wiſdom can foreſee, no Power prevent, are always breaking them. He that rejoyces in his Youth, may like *Diagoras*, be ſtifled with his Laughter: Nay, the Paſſions he indulges may be mortal to him. Fear may kill him, as it did *Herrennius*. Grief may ſtrangle him, as it did *Plautinus*, and he may like *Sylla*, vomit out his Blood and Soul together, in a Tranſport of immoderate Anger.

Nay Death armed with no other Weapon, than a Grape-ſtone, the Bone of a Fiſh, a Fly, a Hair, or his own Spittle; may take him from the World before he hath had any Enjoyment of it. So that there is nothing ſo feeble and contemptible, but may be as fatal to him, as if the Poles ſhould crack, and bury him in the Ruines of the Univerſe.

But if he eſcapes theſe Caſualties, he hath an Enemy within, much more pernicious to him; the Conſtitution of his Body, which conſiſts of ſuch Materials as are always

always jarring and at variance among themſelves; and in this, as in all other civil Diſcords, which ever Faction gets the better and becomes predominant, the whole Republick is a Sufferer, and the Conquerour, like *Sampſon* pulling down the *Philiſtine*'s Palace, is himſelf involv'd in the general Deſtruction.

'Tis therefore a neceſſary Caution, that we ſhould not *boaſt our ſelves of To-morrow, becauſe we know not what a day may bring forth*, Prov. 27. 1.

VVe know not with what Births the Womb of Time may be pregnant, or of what Events a few Hours may be delivered. And when we are not ſecure of a Day, nay cannot command an Hour, or arreſt a Minute to wait for us; ſhall we promiſe to our ſelves length of Days, and encreaſe of Years, even to old Age?

If they who depend upon To-morrow for the improvement of their Worldly Fortune, fall under reproof, *Jam.* 4. 13. What rebuke do they deſerve, who defer to employ themſelves *in thinking on their Ways*, to a remoter Day, and talk as confidently of futurity, as if it were at their diſpoſal? Whereas they ought to ſay, *If the Lord will*, we ſhall live and think upon our Ways. For Faith unfeigned and ſincere,

cere Repentance are not Things that grow within their own Incloſures, they are not their Menials, that they ſhould be ſo well commanded *to go and come* at a word, like the *Centurion*'s Souldiers. Theſe are part of God's Prerogative, to diſpoſe of as he pleaſes, and Men cannot determine the time wherein they will believe and repent, and withal be ſure to find acceptance. Can we think it reaſonable that we ſhould conſume the Bloſſom of our Days in the Drudgeries of Sin and Satan, and reſerve our withered decrepit Age for the Service of God, or that he will be contented with it? Shall the Strength of our Parts and Spirits, the beſt of our Time and Subſtance be ſpent in *riotous living*, and God only be thought on, when we can ſin no more? When our Liberty is reſtrained by ſome bodily Diſtemper, and our Power ſuſpended by ſome enfeebling Languiſhment? When the whole courſe of our Lives hath been a *Carriere to Hell*, will the ſhort Reflection which our remnant of Time will give us leave to make, ſuffice to think effectually on our Ways, and exerciſe our ſelves aright in a Duty which we have ſo rarely practiſed? Habits are the ſource of Humane Actions, and a habit, the Schoolmen tells us, cannot be contracted, but by

repeated Acts, and there is only one Help and Succour againſt a vicious Practice, and that is the contrary Cuſtom; and then what will become of him who hath not time for ſecond Thoughts, and a review of his paſt Life? If any one ſhall object the Caſe of the penitent Thief; there are Anſwers as obvious as the Inſtance which will ſuperſede the trouble of reciting them; and we may as well urge the neceſſity of being in his Circumſtances, as to the manner of his Death; as argue for the Acceptance of a late Penitent from the time of his Converſion.

It will be more beneficial to conſider how many Souls have miſcarried upon this account, than to truſt to it.

While they have adjourned the Seſſion of their Thoughts *for examining their Ways*, Death hath often interpoſed, and called them to another Inquiry, before they had begun their own: While they have hovered in ſuſpence between their Reſolves and the execution of them; like St. *Paul* in his *ſtraight* between Life and Death, the *fatal Night wherein no man can work*, hath put a ſtop to their Proceedings, and ſhut them up in endleſs Darkneſs. And thus they have become like one who falls haſtily to his Meat, with deſign to crave a Bleſ-

a Bleſſing after he is filled, but is choaked with the firſt Morſel, for a puniſhment of his neglect. But we muſt not think to deal with our Lives, at *Tully* did with his Orations, and leave that part to the laſt, which ſhould firſt employ our Thoughts, for it will be with different ſucceſs; and though he received Applauſe, we ſhall incur a Check. Let it then be our Wiſdom, *to know in our preſent day, the things belonging to our peace*, leſt they *be hidden from our Eyes before* the next. Let us think upon our Ways while we are young, and we ſhall have the leſs to do when we are old. And all ſuch young Men who ſhall conſcionably ſet about the practice of this great and neceſſary Duty, ſhall find the Word of God declaring his Approbation of their Doings; and that their being thus *ſober minded*, in thinking early *on their ways*, will be more their *Glory*, than all their *Strength and Vigour*.

But if this Employment is ſo much the Buſineſs and the Ornament of Youth, it is more requiſite and becoming in Age. If the uncertainty of living ſhould haſten young Men to perform it; the certainty of dying ſoon, ſhould oblige the old not to defer it. Their having been long Travellers in the way of all the Earth, gives

them reaſon to believe they are near their Journeys end. The untiling of the Roofs, the decay of the Windows, the failure of the Pillars, and the general impairing of the Fabricks of their Bodies, are ſad Prognoſticks of their ſpeedy fall; and ſure it will be high time to provide other Habitations for their Souls againſt their earthly Tabernacles are diſſolved; high time to think in what Way they are going, becauſe if not quickly done, they will be paſt the advantage of it, and loſe the Opportunity of reforming their Errour, if they find they have gone wrong.

Beſides, their Parts have been long upon the Theatre of this World, and they have more to think upon, than thoſe who made their *Exit* ſooner, which makes it a greater Task to look ſo far behind them, to their firſt entrance, and think conſiderately on all the Excellencies or Miſcarriages in their Action all the while, wherefore they muſt begin this Buſineſs quickly, leſt they ſhould want leiſure to diſpatch it; and the rather, becauſe this is probably the time of their own prefixing for this Work; for either they reſolved never to think *upon their ways*, or to do it now at leaſt: and indeed now their Hindrances are not ſo great or many as in their youth; the *weak-*

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neſs of the fleſh betrayed them then to ſin, but now with-holds them from it; the Vanities of the World, have now loſt their alluring Charms; ſo that nothing but the third Enemy of Mankind, the Devil, can diſſuade them from this excellent Employment, and even he hath not ſo much to work upon, nor can lay ſo many Baits as formerly, to withdraw and divert them from it.

Since *Man at his beſt eſtate is altogether vanity*, and the whole courſe of his life *is walking in a vain ſhadow*, ſhould he not deſire to *know how frail he is?* Should he not conſider his many Failings and Deviations, and whether he hath already begg'd God's pardon for them, and reformed his Errours, or hath it yet to do? If he hath already diſpatched that Buſineſs, with what Complacency and Satisfaction will he review the Hiſtory of his Life; when either he finds no Act of his upon that Record, which can juſtly bring a Bluſh into his Face, and obſerves no Day of his Life that he could wiſh forgotten, but takes as much delight in reflecting on his paſt-time, as he did in ſpending it, or where he had committed any Faults, ſees the Pages wherein they were regiſtred, blotted over, and no remembrance of them preſerved

to his diſadvantage; will it not be time well ſpent in ſo ſatisfactory an Employment of his Thoughts? Or if he finds his old Iniquities ſtill chronicled, the ſtains not waſhed away with penitential Tears, nor the Score wiped off by God's forgiving Hand; will not this remembrance of his Ways make him aſhamed, and fill him with Confuſion? Will it not ſend him immediately to the *Throne of Grace* to ſue his Pardon out, and never let him be at peace within himſelf, till God is pacified towards him for all that he hath done: And ſure the guilt which was the buſineſs of many years to contract, will coſt ſome time and labour in its removal, and he who hath at moſt but a few minutes left to perfect that mighty work, ought not to miſpend a moment, but husband well the poor remainder of his days, which is the All he hath to truſt to, and while he enjoys a Being upon earth, employ it in the purſuit of a better life in Heaven. He ſhou'd *trim his lamp* while it is burning, that if it be poſſible, what hath hitherto caſt but a dim and languid light, may expire in a glorious blaze.

And if it hath not been his care to have lived well in his youth, he muſt be the more induſtrious to amend his life, that he may dye

dye well in his Age; and that at laſt by following the righteous in their ways, he may overtake them, in a reſemblance of their *latter end.* It is not for us to perſiſt in our negligence, becauſe we have ſlipt the faireſt ſeaſon; but we muſt rather redeem the time by greater induſtry, that tho' we *go forth weeping* for our loſt opportunities; yet if we ſow *good ſeed* in the reſidue of our days, we may *return with joy, and bring our ſheaves with us.*

Nor ſhou'd the oldeſt non-proficient of us be aſhamed to begin to learn this Duty in his age, unleſs becauſe he did not earlier apply himſelf to the task; but if he hath not practiſed it from his youth up, he will find the greater reaſon to be ſtudious in it, when he is old. Since *the hoary head is a Crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteouſneſs.* But for thoſe who are men in years to be *babes in Chriſt*, and (when *for their time, they ought to be Teachers) to have need of being taught*, this is an ignorance, than which nothing can be more unpardonable, but the perſevering in it; for *ſhame ſhall be to him that refuſeth inſtruction*, but *he is in the way of life that keepeth it:* and therefore we muſt make haſte to *take faſt hold of it, before our fleſh and bodies are*

conſumed, leſt we mourn at laſt for the omiſſion.

So far are we from having occaſion to ſeek refuge in excuſes for our late beginning to addict our ſelves to this excellent employment of thinking on our ways, that it wou'd be inexcuſable to defer it longer.

The man who hath ſpent moſt of his days in folly and extravagance, if at laſt he grows ſerious and reſerved, hath no reaſon to bluſh at his coming to himſelf, but at his being ſo long inſenſible. Such a folly and madneſs is a courſe of ſin, and if by a ſerious reflection on our ſelves, and a manifeſtation given us, by the *true light*, of the reproveable impertinencies in which we are engaged, we *awake* out of our *ſleep*, and *ariſe from the dead*; that is, forſake our ſinful ways, and put away the evil of our doings; nothing will be liable to objection in our amendment, but it's not bearing a more ancient date.

But at what time a ſinner thinks upon his ways, and turns his feet unto God's teſtimonies, there is a Jubilee in Heaven, and the farther he is gone in a wrong courſe, and the more likely to be irreclamable, the more abundant is the Joy: and God's extraordinary ſatisfaction to find a *Son that was loſt*, will obliterate the remembrance

membrance of his undutiful departure. The Prodigal was young when he left his father's houſe, but he had conſumed much of his time as well as ſubſtance in living from it, and yet he was not diſcouraged in his age, to return to that place which the folly of his youth had tempted him to forſake; but as ſoon as ever he came to himſelf, he put on reſolutions to go home, and we find he was not upbraided for his late ſubmiſſion, but the extravagancies of his youth rendred it more acceptable. To conclude this point, ſince *the days* of old men *are but few*, and their weakneſſes have been great and many, let them endeavour *to recover ſtrength before they go hence, and are no more.*

Now that neither young nor old may be hindred in the right performance of their Duty in thinking on their ways, let us, if we can, make a diſcovery of thoſe obſtacles and impediments that divert our thoughts from that employment: and ſo we ſhall be the better able to remove them, and we ſhall find we are hindred partly through theſe following means.

Firſt, through unworthy conſtructions and improvements of God's patience and forbearance, whoſe great deſign and end is to encourage us to this duty, and to *lead*

us to repentance; but the wicked make not ſuch a profitable uſe and happy advantage of it, but *becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore their heart is fully ſet to do evil.* Becauſe the Atheiſt blaſphemes Heaven, and is not blaſted with its Lightning; becauſe the Swearer takes God's Name in vain, and is not immediately ſtruck dumb; becauſe the Drunkard is not indeed turned into a beaſt, for making himſelf like one, in his exceſs; becauſe the Adulterer does not always find a *Phineas* to ſtab him in the midſt of his unchaſt embraces; hence it is that men become ſo bold in ſinning, and ſo daring, or at leaſt ſo inconſiderate and fooliſh, that they dally with damnation, and play upon the mouth of Hell, as fearleſs as *the ſucking child on the hole of the Aſp, and the weaned child on the Cocatrice den*, as if they ſhou'd not *hurt nor deſtroy* in the ways of ſin, any more than *in the holy mountain.* And while they live as if there was not a God, and do not find his Vengeance in the puniſhment of their impieties, they are confirmed in a disbelief of his Exiſtence. But if while we are boaſting of our ſelves, and glorying in our abilities, while our *hearts are lifted up, and our minds hardned in pride*; we ſhou'd like the King

King of *Babylon*, be checked by a Voice from Heaven, and turned to feed among beaſts; if when we provoke God, the Earth ſhou'd ſwallow us up, as perſons unworthy to live upon it; ſuch Judgments wou'd teach others caution, and they wou'd no longer *be high-minded, but fear*, they wou'd not venture upon ſin, when they found it the way to ruine, and that by indulging it, they made court to their own deſtruction. But becauſe God is *ſlow to anger*, and of *great compaſſion*, they are ready to demand, *Who is the Lord, that they ſhou'd obey his voice.* Becauſe *he doth not willingly afflict the children of men*, therefore they think *he doth not ſee*, and that *there is no knowledge in the moſt High.*

We find his ſilence made the wicked conclude him an Accomplice with them, and fanſie him *ſuch a one as themſelves*, and becauſe *he deferred his coming*, there were *Scoffers* that asked, *Where is the promiſe of it?* Becauſe in the adminiſtrations of his wrath *he remembers mercy*, and makes many pauſes, becauſe *he whets his ſword*, and *bends his bow, and makes ready his arrows*, and beſtows ſo much time in preparing the inſtruments of death, we are apt to flatter our ſelves, that he is not in earneſt, and hath no deſign to uſe them. But if we had

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the leaſt mixture of ingenuity in the temper of our Souls, we ſhou'd fly to the embraces of thoſe arms which have been ſo long ſtretched forth, and not put that patience to a farther tryal, whereof we have had ſuch repeated proofs. God forbid we ſhou'd incline to ſo accurſed and dangerous a Principle, as to *continue in ſin, that Grace may abound*, for if *we refuſe when he calls, and regard not when he ſtretches out his hand; he will execute his fierce wrath upon us, and laugh at our calamity* under it.

A ſecond thing that obſtructs our thinking on our ways is, becauſe we find ſome difficulty and trouble in reforming them. The pains of reſiſting Satan, and grappling with Corruption, are harſh and diſagreeable to fleſh and blood. When we are injoyned to *mortifie our earthly members*, to ſubdue our luſts and paſſions, we think the Command no leſs ſevere than that for *Abraham* to ſacrifice his Son, and have not ſo near a relation to him, that we can undertake it with his readineſs; when we come to *ſhew our faith by our works*, it ſcarce appears equal to a *grain of muſtard ſeed.* To be *ſober and vigilant*, that we be not devoured; to *watch and pray*, that *we enter not into temptation*; to keep a guard upon our thoughts, our words, and actions, that they do

do not go aſtray, or offend in any thing; ſeems a task ſo toilſome and laborious, that we ſoon grow tired of the employment, become remiſs and carleſs in it, and cry with the Jews, *behold what a Wearineſs it is?* Mal. 1. 13. and for this reaſon, inſtead of a *pure offering* which God requires, we *ſacrifice corrupt things to him, the torn, the lame and the ſick*, which inſtead of finding acceptance, bring a curſe upon us. The ſtrictneſs and ſeverity of a Chriſtian life, is the *Lyon in our way*, that hinders our proficiency in it; we cannot confine our ſelves to the reſtraints it lays upon us, nor comply with the mortifications it injoyns; we look on it as a *Yoke*, without conſidering its *eaſineſs*, and we cannot bear it, though light, becauſe it is a *burden*. The thorny rugged path to Heaven offends and galls our feet, and we will not advance a ſtep towards it, unleſs we may have liberty to paſs through the delightful ways of an Earthly Paradiſe. *Faſting* is an unpleaſant entertainment to thoſe, who have uſed themſelves to *fare deliciouſly every day*; and a *garment of Camels hair* would but ill agree with the ſoftneſs and effeminacy of thoſe who have known nothing courſer than *purple and fine linnen*; ſo that, we go on without interruption, in a ſenſual courſe of life. And

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while we dare not think upon our ways, to reform them for the future, we are more afraid to think upon them, to repent of what is paſt. For there we find nothing but a melancholy, hideous proſpect, that fills us with anxiety and terrour; to be rid of which, we diſmiſs our thoughts from that employment, and betake our ſelves to our merry inconſiderate life again, to divert our minds from the remembrance of what ſo much diſturbed them. But why ſhou'd we look ſo much at the hardſhips in our way, as not to mind the pleaſures at our journey's end? Why ſhould we be more terrified with the difficulties and hazards of the Combate, than encouraged by the Triumphs that attend the Victory? If we look to *the Joy* and *the Crown* deſigned for our Reward, we ſhall not *be weary nor faint in our minds*, nor fall under the *Ephraimites* diſgrace of *turning our ſelves back in the day of battel.* We ſhall then *fight, not as thoſe that beat the air*; and *run, not as uncertainly*; *but keep under our bodies, and bring them into ſubjection*, which will be the only way to make them and our Souls too, *free indeed.* And when the ſenſe of the acute pains, and extream throes in travail, nay the very remembrance of them too, is loſt in the ſatisfaction that *a man child*

child is born into the world; ſhall not the contemplation of our being *born again to an inheritance in Heaven*, enable us to go chearfully through all that is uneaſie and pungent in our regeneration.

And we have the aſſiſtance of theſe two Conſiderations towards the work.

Firſt, That the enemies with whom we are to engage, cannot give us any long diſturbance. Our death will free us from all their attempts, and the diſquietudes they occaſion. Our ſins ſhall be buried in our Graves, beyond the hope of a Reſurrection. Whereas we ſhall riſe from thence as clear from the ſpots and ſcars of that nauſeous Leproſie, as *Naaman* was after his aſcent from *Jordan*. Then we ſhall have no more rebellious paſſions to ſubdue, no more unruly luſts to curb; no more obdurate hearts to vex us, no more unreaſonable appetites to diſtract us, but having obtained a total victory, nay being *more than conquerours*, we ſhall be *at perfect peace*.

For with our fleſh we ſhall put off all the failings and infirmities of it, that prediſpoſed matter, which was ſo eaſily wrought on to our prejudice; and drop our earthly inclinations, as *Elijah* did his mantle, when we are tranſlated from this world. And whatever hath been troubleſom

bleſom to us, and an impediment to our pilgrimage in this life, ſhall not retard our journey to the next, nor interrupt our pleaſures there: for whatever defileth, or worketh abomination, ſhall in no wiſe enter into our poſſeſſion, the City of the living God. Let this thought therefore ſtrengthen and inſpirit us, to undertake the Combate reſolutely, and to fight under our Saviour's Banner with the chearfulneſs and bravery of thoſe Souldiers who perceive Victory declaring in their favour, and their enemies preparing for a ſpeedy flight, and diſabled for evermore to take the field againſt them.

Secondly, Let us conſider, that it is more advantageous, as well as more honorable, to fight with courage now, where the Battel will not continue long, than to be condemned to everlaſting Torments for our Cowardiſe, and have *them that hate us made Lords over us.* 'Tis better to *enter into life halt and maimed*, than having every part and member whole and unhurt, to be ſentenced to eternal death: for this diſmal puniſhment is decreed for thoſe, who not regarding the illuſtrious Original of their Souls, meanly condeſcend to encreaſe the Devil's triumph by yielding themſelves his Captives. Is it not better then to ſtrive and take

take ſome pains in giving a repulſe to his aſſaults, than by tame ſubmiſſions to become ſharers in his condemnation? Is it not our intereſt to encounter him here, though we are ſometimes bruiſed and wounded in the unequal congreſs, rather than let him carry us to that perdition, to which he is ſentenced irrecoverably? The world hath not wanted inſtances of men who have choſen an honourable death before an ignominious life; who amidſt their Tortures *would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better reſurrection.* And ſhall not we, being *compaſſed about with ſuch a cloud of witneſſes*, who have led the way, follow their great Example, and *wax valiant in this fight*, ſince we know we ſhall *turn to flight the armies of the Aliens?* Have not we reaſon to prefer the toil and hazard of ſuch a Conflict, before a life more intolerable than death in all its terrors? But why ſhou'd we apprehend the hardſhips of this ſpiritual Warfare, which will vaniſh by degrees, and as they grow more familiar, become leſs formidable? The Souldier by frequent uſe of Armour, grows inſenſible of its weight, that galled and wearied him at firſt; and tedious Marches, hungry meals, ſhort ſleep, and ſudden Alarms, which once fatigued and harraſſed him, are at laſt his diverſion, and he cannot live

out of a Camp, who once thought it death to continue in it. We think it now a Herculean labour to deliberate on every action, to inquire into every thought, and to examine every word; to queſtion all our motions, whence they come, and to what end they tend, before we ſign their Paſsport; but if we will once try (and the Experiment is ſafe and harmleſs) we ſhall find there is not any ſenſual pleaſure comparable to thoſe ſublimated Joys the Soul extracts from the knowledge of its ſincere endeavours to recommend it ſelf to God, by obedience to his Will. And nothing is more neceſſary and conducive to this work, than to employ the reflex and direct acts of our Souls in thinking on our ways: that we may diſcover our paſt errours, and through a juſt ſenſe and abhorrence of them, avoid all future wanderings. For if we do not think upon our ways, we ſhall live at random, and run into a Labyrinth of Abſurdities, and purſue our own deſtruction: from which nothing can deliver us: but

VI. The *reſult of this Employment of our thoughts, The turning our feet unto God's Teſtimonies.*

And for our better performance of this Duty, let us conſider what it is to turn our feet unto God's Teſtimonies.

As the Sacred Writings have couched

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our life and converſation under the Metaphor of a Way, ſo they comprehend our appetites, inclinations, affections under that of Feet, they having in the performance of our actions the ſame office that feet bear in the motion of our bodies, and carry us forward in all our ways. Thus the Prophet in the deſcription of the wickedneſs of *Iſrael*, gives it for one part of their Character, that *their feet were ſwift to ſhed blood.*

That is, their deſires and inclinations had an eager bent to Murder: and that ſaying of the Spouſe, *I have waſhed my feet, how ſhall I defile them?* Cant. 5. 3. implies her having cleanſed and purified her affections, after which they ought not to be again ſullied and polluted, by any inclination to impiety. Now the Teſtimonies of God are his Commandments, thoſe holy Sanctions that have informed us what is good and agreeable to him, and what wicked and diſpleaſing, and injoined us obedience to his Will in the practice of the one, and a total abſtinence from the other, adding promiſes of large rewards to encourage us in the performance of our Duty, and threatnings of ſevere puniſhments to deter us from neglecting it. Thus the Law which *Moſes* ſet before the Children of *Iſrael*, is called *the Teſtimonies, and the Statutes, and the Judgments which he ſpake*

unto them, Deut. 4. 45. And in *David's* charge to *Solomon* on his death-bed, the firſt and principal injunction is, *Keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways; to keep his Statutes and his Commandments, and his Judgments, and his Teſtimonies*, as it is written in the Law of *Moſes, that thou mayſt proſper in all thou doeſt, and whitherſoever thou turneſt thy ſelf*, 1 Kings 2. 3. From all which we ſhall perceive, that by turning our feet unto God's Teſtimonies, is meant;

Firſt, Our examining and judging of our ways by comparing them with God's Commandments.

Secondly, Our amending them, by making them conformable to thoſe directions: the word *Turning* being expreſſive of both theſe notions. And indeed if we turn, as God commands us, *to the Law and to the Teſtimony*, we ſhall find it *a light unto our feet, and a lanthorn to our paths*, in each of theſe reſpects: for *the Commandment is a lamp, and the Law a light*, directing us to the knowledge and diſcovery of Sin. By the help of this inſtruction, we ſhall think effectually on our ways, we ſhall ſee how exactly we have walked by the rule of life preſcribed us, or wherein we have ſwerved and varied from it. His Teſtimonies will be Evidences of his pleaſure and our obedience:

obedience: they will ſhew us whether we have walked *Godly, righteouſly and ſoberly in this preſent world*, in reſpect of him, our neighbour, and our ſelves, or have broke looſe from the reſtraints, and over-leaped the fences of Religion, in impiety, injuſtice, or intemperance. And if we turn our feet unto God's Teſtimonies in this ſenſe; we ſhall quickly turn them in the other. We ſhall *make haſte and not delay to keep his Commandments*, that is, to pay an entire obedience to them for the future in doing all that they require, and abſtaining from whatever they forbid.

Now in this turning conſiſts the whole work and buſineſs of repentance unto Salvation, ſuch a repentance as will need no repenting of: for this includes Averſion and Converſion, the neceſſary qualifications of it; for Repentance (as the Original word imports) is a change of mind for the better, ſuch a change as prevails upon the actions to accompany it, for the Greek Verb ſignifies to be wiſe after the commiſſion of an errour, upon due reflection and ſerious thinking on our ways, as *David* declares he was. We know repentance hath properly its operation, where there hath been the habit of ſome ſin, and in a mind, if not wholly, yet in ſome ſort averſe to Vertue and Religion, inſomuch that it doth

not apply it ſelf to the practice of it, nor exert it in any action; but on the contrary, rather gives it ſelf up to be governed by appetite, and to follow its own inventions. Now when we think upon our ways, and the reflection repreſents to our minds the evil of ſuch doings, and takes off the affection and tendency we had to them, making us put on reſolutions to forſake them; this is properly a turning from them; and the Pſalmiſt means it as one part of the reſult and conſequence of his thinking on his ways, that he turned his feet from the evil of them. This is the term from whence we are to begin our progreſs in the ways of Godlineſs, *the conſidering and turning away from all the tranſgreſſions that we have committed*, Ezek. 18. 28. But then there muſt be the term to which we are to move our *repentance from dead works*, muſt terminate in *ſerving the living God*, and make *his teſtimonies our delight and our Counſellors* to direct our ways.

And when we are in this good and right way to Salvation, we muſt go vigorouſly on; for if we once *ſtand* ſtill, it will be *in the way of ſinners*, and we ſhall quickly go aſtray again among thoſe *whoſe ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths.* Nor may we at all look back upon our former ways, as *Lot*'s Wife did on *Sodom*, with a fondneſs

fondneſs and kind remembrance of them, with concern and reluctancy for quitting them; for this will be an argument that we are not truly turned unto God's Teſtimonies, and if our thoughts and affections are not in a direct Act, looking towards them our Lord will no more receive us than the *Samaritans* wou'd our Saviour, becauſe *his face was as though he would go to Jeruſalem.*

The Word and Law of God is the Rule that muſt guide our ways, if we deſire to *walk humbly* and acceptably with him; *he hath ſhewn* us in it *what is good, and revealed his whole counſel to us.* And if we *have reſpect unto theſe his ways,* in the guidance and direction of our own, we ſhall be ſure not to be miſtaken in them. For *the Law of the Lord is perfect converting the Soul, and his Teſtimony is ſure, making wiſe the ſimple.* The keeping his Precepts made *David wiſer than the aged,* and gave him *more underſtanding than his Teachers.* And his *Statutes* muſt needs *rejoice our hearts* to ſee our ſelves in ſuch a certain way to Happineſs, when his Commandments have *enlightned our eyes* to find it. And if we wou'd be acquainted with all, even our *ſecret faults*; and keep back from *the dominion of preſumptuous ſins*; and live *innocent* from the *great Tranſgreſſions*; from the Teſtimonies

nies of our God we ſhall receive theſe benefits, we ſhall be warned by them from our iniquities, and *in keeping them* we ſhall find *great reward.*

But becauſe *the way of man is not of himſelf, neither is it in him to direct his ſteps, but his goings are of the Lord.* We may very well put the queſtion, *How can a man then underſtand his own way?* Prov. 20. 24. But the Anſwer is as ready, that it muſt be by applying himſelf to him that giveth *wiſdom*, and *out of whoſe mouth cometh knowledge and underſtanding*, Prov. 2. 6. for *the preparations of the heart in man, and the anſwer of the tongue is* from the Lord, and he will *direct his work in truth.*

Let us beſeech him therefore who knoweth all our thoughts, ſo to direct and guide them in the knowledge and diſcovery of our ways, that no paſt evil in them, may eſcape our obſervation and repentance; and that no inadvertency or neglect may ſuffer them to be corrupted by future errours; but that he will pleaſe ſo to order our paths by the influence of his holy Word and Spirit, that he may delight in our ways, and we obtain Salvation by them, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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